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**CAN WE BELIEVE IN GOD?**



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# CAN WE BELIEVE IN GOD?

*By*

C. A. ALINGTON, D.D.



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## PREFACE

JUST after this book was finished there came into my hands the admirable Warburton Lectures by Dr. Streeter, published under the title *The God who Speaks*. It was a great satisfaction to me to find that in his opening chapters he pursues much the same line of argument which I have followed in dealing with what he calls "God's Plan," for he is a scholar of real learning. But in his Prologue he emphasises a point to which I feel that I have drawn insufficient attention, that "the existence and character of God cannot be determined by the kind of reasoning by which we establish an historical fact or a scientific hypothesis." I entirely agree with him when he says that "the meaning of life will evade the search of anyone who, like Pontius Pilate, asks the question, What is truth? without the intention or the courage to face the moral demands of the immediate situation in the light of such truth as he already has.... The way to a knowledge of God will be

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through a re-orientation of purpose and desire, and a constant re-dedication of the self to the highest that it knows.”

I should like this book to be read with that thought constantly in mind.

C. A. A.

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## INTRODUCTION

THIS little book represents to some extent a compromise—reached, I hasten to add, without undue tension—between the writer and the editor of the series. The editor feels that too much space is occupied with intellectual arguments which nothing but his natural courtesy prevents him from describing as dry and indigestible. He complains that, rather late in the book, the Christian God is “suddenly introduced,” and asks what God has been considered hitherto: “surely,” he says, “it must be the Christian God throughout Whom we are considering.”

The writer (with whom I naturally have more sympathy) replies that if he is asked to write a book with the title “Can we Believe in God?” he is not entitled to take anything for granted. His feeling is that, whereas most people start life with some belief of the kind, it rests upon no sure intellectual foundation: the result is that, when they grow up and meet some “clever” people who tell them that such beliefs are mere superstition, they, either readily or sadly, abandon them, quite unconscious that



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there is a perfectly good answer to be given. It is the purpose of this book to show that, so far from being an outworn superstition, the belief in God supplies the only intelligible and intelligent answer to the problems of life.

That intellectual arguments must seem dry is inevitable, but that is no excuse for refusing to consider them. There are some happy people whose faith rests on perfectly sure and personal grounds: this book is not written for them, though even they may be glad of such support as it can afford when they are called upon to give a reason for the faith that is in them, even if no one was ever converted to Christianity by pure argument.

The complaint as to the nature of the God Whom we are discussing seems to the writer to rest on a misunderstanding of the process of the argument. He sees a world in which a very great many intelligent people are not prepared to give a serious hearing to the evidence for Christianity, because of a vague prejudice which tells them that any belief in God is out of date: they are prepared to admire Christ as a

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human being, but not to regard him as revealing the nature of God because they are sure that there is no God to be revealed.

We have therefore to begin by trying to establish the existence of a God with a purpose for the world and for the men whom He has made: we go on to consider what inferences we can fairly draw, apart from revelation, as to His character and the type of purpose which we may expect Him to have. This is illustrated from the God of the Old Testament, where we find that revelation combines with reason to show us a supreme care for Justice, Righteousness and Truth. Finally we suggest, what indeed must have been obvious from the first, that it is only in the God Whom Christ proclaimed and revealed that we can find any full satisfaction for our belief, or any final object for our worship. In this sense it is the Christian God Whom we have been considering throughout; but to have assumed that from the first would have been to alienate the very people whom we hope to convince. After all, the question propounded is "Can we believe in God?"

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and not "Can we accept the Christian revelation?"

So these are the reasons why I (to drop this tiresome anonymity) have been unwilling to reduce the "intellectual and moral arguments," though I have, in deference to the editor's wishes, added some more purely "Christian" evidences, which, from my point of view, belong more properly to another volume.

I cannot refrain from adding a few paragraphs which he thinks needless, though I have shortened them considerably, for I think they contain something which needs saying.

Of course a man *can* believe in God: very many do: what we are trying to establish is that he can do so not only without any treason to his intellect, but in obedience to its commands. Modern knowledge has done nothing to make faith absurd.

Whether *we* can believe depends on our characters, and on our readiness to use such faculties as we may possess: if we want, as many people do, to believe without thinking, we ought to remind ourselves that we have no reason to suppose that

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such belief is acceptable to God. It is a moral offence not to use one's brains. Laziness is one of the seven deadly sins, and intellectual laziness does more harm in a country like ours than the mere inefficiency which loses a man his job. There is no moral value in the acceptance of a creed about which we have never thought: can we doubt that God esteems more highly the heretic or even the atheist who has really done his best to use his brains than the "orthodox" believer whose belief comes from mere inertia?

There are few imaginary pictures on which a Christian will more willingly dwell than that of the honest unbeliever finding at last, in a world where all is known, that the truth is something far better than he had dared to believe: a world where Buddha, for example, will find that there was no need to despair of man, or Shelley that he need not have despaired of God.

As for belief as a whole, there are some people who actually hold that a rational being should believe in nothing which he does not *know* to be true. Those who say this ignore not only the part which belief

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inevitably plays in the common affairs of every day, but the fact that it is only by holding and testing beliefs that knowledge has come into existence.

Faith is so often derided as a sign of weakness that it is worth while to remind ourselves how impossible life would be if we relied solely upon knowledge :

What but faith do we abhor  
And idolise each other for ?  
Faith in our evil and our good  
Which is, or is not, understood  
Aright by those we hate, or those  
We love, so called our friends or foes ?

This characteristic question of Browning is really unanswerable : love or even friendship is inevitably an act of faith : it is impossible to prove to a hostile audience either our love for others or their love for us. It is a logical possibility that Christ's death upon the cross was caused not by love for the world, but by a fanatical obstinacy or by ambition fed by the delusive hope of a last minute rescue.

Belief in a person involves some moral kinship with him : a bare intellectual belief in God has no spiritual value : " the devils,"

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says St. James, "believe and tremble," but are none the less devils for that.

Again, it may be held that belief has always in it an element of emotion which pure reason cannot approve, but this theory is untenable. A scientist may no doubt be unconsciously swayed by the desire that his theory should be found true, but in so far as he is so swayed he has ceased to be a true scientist, and it is far more characteristic of the true seeker after knowledge to hold his beliefs subject to the discovery of new fact. It is a thousand pities that faith should be regarded purely as a theological virtue: faith is "the evidence of things not seen" not only for the religious man, but for every honest seeker after truth. The man of science is not limited to what he knows: we are grateful to him also when he tells us of his beliefs, and it is through those beliefs that his knowledge, like ours, makes its progress.

Finally, the word God has borne an almost infinite variety of meanings, and we have a right to ask that when this question is discussed some real attempt should be made to discover the character of the God

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in Whom belief is asked. To disbelieve in God because of the foolish and wicked things which have been said about Him is a common error the unreason of which needs no demonstration. It is more sensible, though only a little more, to disbelieve in Him because of the evil that has been done in His name ; but this argument will only appeal to those who do not think it out. Many evils have been wrought in the sacred name of Liberty ; but our conclusion in that case is not that Liberty is a bad thing, but that the mere profession of a belief in it is no guarantee either of the intelligence or the honesty of those who make it. The moral to be drawn from the excesses of the French Revolution is not that Liberty is a false ideal, but that its votaries believed only in Liberty for themselves. If the Goddess of Liberty must have disapproved wholeheartedly of the indiscriminate use of the guillotine, with what eyes must the Christian God have regarded the intolerance and the cruelty of many of His self-styled followers ?

But for us, as has already been said, it is absurd to treat the conception of God in

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abstraction from the picture of God drawn by Jesus Christ. The supreme attractiveness of that picture, as revealed in his earthly life, has been proved in every century and in every continent: its truth and power are attested by the lives of countless saints, both those recorded in the Calendar and the great cloud of witnesses who compass us about in our daily life—the humble, unselfish workers for the good of others of whom we think too little, who all draw their inspiration from the same source. It awaits its verification in your life and mine, and that verification will be found in proportion as we are able with courage and sincerity to say not only “I believe in God,” but “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord.”





## CHAPTER I

### OF THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

THIS little book, then, is written primarily for those who are in real doubt as to what answer should be given to the question which its title asks. It is not in the first place intended for those who feel no hesitation about their answer.

It is concerned at first with the bare belief in God, but of course that belief is of no real value unless we can attribute some definite character to the God in Whom we believe. It need not be said that for a Christian, or indeed for the whole Western world, the only possible character for God is that revealed by Jesus Christ, but we approach the question not directly as one of revelation, but as one of reason. If there is a God, He must have a purpose in His creation, and that purpose must be what we call "good," unless we suppose that we are entirely incapable of knowing what "goodness" is, and that is a counsel of absolute despair.

The attempt is therefore made in the second part of the book to show what effect

the belief in a good God may reasonably be expected to have upon a man's life, and then finally to show how that somewhat abstract belief is given warmth and colour if we accept the picture drawn of Him by Jesus Christ—a picture drawn in words and still more clearly revealed in action.

It is no part of our purpose to “ prove ” Christianity by argument, or by the methods proper to the simple evangelist, but rather to show on how secure an intellectual foundation its beliefs rest, and how inevitable it seems to be that those who take the first step along the road should pursue it to its logical conclusion. Clough once wrote :

But still, when all is thought and said,  
The heart must overrule the head :  
Still what we hope we must believe  
And what is given us receive.

Our purpose is to show that “ the heart ” and “ the head ” are not, in this matter, in antagonism: the heart may take a quicker road, but the head will reach the same goal. “ What we hope ” may be believed on other grounds than those of a facile optimism, and “ what is given us ” in the revelation of Jesus Christ can be

seen as the culmination of a process to which the whole creation bears witness.

“ We see not yet all things made subject unto him ” (if we may slightly misapply some words from the Epistle to the Hebrews), but we see him as the one hope not only of the individual sinner, but as holding the one possible answer to the problems of a distracted world.

It is a difficult, and may well be thought a presumptuous, thing for one who is not a learned thinker to offer an answer to such a question as this. He is conscious that he is contending not so much against particular and well-defined antagonists as against a condition of the intellectual atmosphere: there are, of course, some thinkers who are ready, and indeed anxious, to demonstrate the futility of such a belief, but the vast majority of those who reject it do so on no clearly-reasoned grounds: unbelief is in the air, and they have caught the infection.

It is easy, and it is sometimes very tempting, to sneer at the absence of thought which lies behind much contemporary atheism: Lord Bacon, it will be remembered, pointed out that the fool *said* in his heart

that there was no God, but that it was not recorded that he *thought* so. But this is a dangerous argument to employ, for atheists have no sort of monopoly of shallow thinking, and the majority of those who embrace any creed would be hard put to it to provide any adequate intellectual defence of their beliefs. Vague accusations of insincerity do no good to either side, and a Christian apologist should be very chary of bringing them: he, of all men, is bound to believe that truth stands in no need of doubtful weapons, and should try to set an example of the right spirit in which to conduct an argument. He can endeavour to point out the weaknesses in his opponent's case without imputing to him moral obliquity or more than a normal share of human laziness and fallibility.

It is lamentably true that this has not always been the attitude adopted by Christian controversialists, and they are in no small measure to blame for the hostile atmosphere which they have to face. So long as it was maintained that a disbelief in God was practically inconsistent with morality, any honest seeker after truth was

perilously handicapped: no sane man would maintain that position to-day: he may, indeed he must, believe that a sound belief tends to produce good living and a false belief the opposite: he may, and must if he is a Christian, believe that a belief in the Christian God is the only sure foundation for morals, and he is entitled to produce evidence to show that when that belief is cast aside morals soon deteriorate, but he does not need to be told either that many men are far better than their creed or that many others are incalculably worse.

To suggest that this means that creeds are unimportant things is as ridiculous as to suggest that there is no such thing as a sound theory of cricket because some ill-instructed batsmen make many runs while others make none in spite of the most careful coaching.

But the centuries of ecclesiastical domination have left an evil impression on the public mind, and, in so far as that domination was created to promote belief in a particular creed and to penalise doubt and inquiry, have created a prejudice which it will take

many years to eradicate. The Church of England is so far removed from being a persecuting body that many of its critics from another angle question, very unjustly, its loyalty to its own faith : it is a curious and pathetic fact that while it is being blamed for its criminal indifference to doctrinal truth it is also an object of suspicion to those who wish for the liberty to have no faith at all.

We are bound, in so important a matter, to try to banish from our minds, before our inquiry begins, the prejudices caused by "old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago." The outrages committed in the name of God have no more bearing on the controversy of to-day than the grotesque errors of early men of science : they teach us, it is true, that the mere profession of a creed is no guarantee that it is either practised or understood aright ; but we were very stupid if we did not know that before, and very dishonest if we employ it as an argument against those who have most reason to regret the sins and follies of their predecessors. Some religious men have believed that God liked human sacri-

fice: some earnest doctors have recommended the most ridiculous remedies: what does either fact even remotely prove to the discredit either of religion or of medicine?

But no doubt the chief ingredient in the modern intellectual atmosphere is that provided by science: it is very natural that its astonishing achievements should have captured the imagination of mankind and have induced the belief that it is all-powerful and all-embracing. Its credentials are extremely plain: it has altered the life of man with a speed incomparably greater than any other power: in comparison with its record the slow progress of Christianity in altering man's character may well seem futile and negligible. Why should we worship an unknown and invisible god when we have so visible a power to adore? It should be added that this adoration of science as omni-competent is by no means countenanced by the greatest scientists of the present day. But public opinion is always more than a generation behind the facts in any intellectual controversy, and the naked and militant



materialism of the end of the last century has an influence to-day in unscientific circles far beyond its scientific deserts.

There has only been one period in English history when a similar challenge was offered to the established methods of thought, the age of Elizabeth, and the change which then took place has been described in one of the most beautiful passages in English prose :—

For, indeed, a change was coming upon the world, the meaning and direction of which even still is hidden from us, a change from era to era. The paths trodden by the footsteps of ages were broken up ; old things were passing away, and the faith and the life of ten centuries were dissolving like a dream. Chivalry was dying ; the abbey and the castle were soon together to crumble into ruins ; and all the forms, desires, beliefs, convictions of the old world were passing away, never to return. A new continent had risen up beyond the western sea. The floor of heaven, inlaid with stars, had sunk back into an infinite abyss of immeasurable space : and the firm earth itself, unfixed from its foundations, was seen to be but a small atom in the awful vastness of the universe. In the fabric of habit which they had so laboriously built for themselves, mankind were to remain no longer.<sup>1</sup>

But, vast as the change was, it is possible

<sup>1</sup> Froude, *History of England*, Vol. I.

to exaggerate it. However much the fashions of life may have changed and however great may have been the widening of the intellectual horizon, the men whom Chaucer painted on the road to Canterbury were not very unlike those whom Shakespeare put up on the stage, nor do we, in our very different age, feel ourselves out of sympathy with the very English Elizabethans. In every century the great events of human life, birth, marriage and death, go on with little change, and in every century the heart of man, or whatever name we may choose to give to his inmost self, is occupied with problems which science so far has made no attempt to solve.

For indeed, as we shall suggest in detail later on, there is a vast field of human interest which lies inevitably beyond its purview: it has as little direct concern with religion as it has with poetry or any other art; and to allow it to dominate our thinking is to deny more than half our birthright. We recognise that it naturally creates a frame of mind which is impatient of discussion of metaphysical topics: we admire unreservedly its achievements in

its concrete sphere, but we frankly consider the "purely scientific" attitude to be a ridiculous posture before the greatest questions which mankind has to consider.

We have to endeavour to force an unwilling world to think of subjects beyond its power to grasp: we have to face the hostility of those who think that knowledge is, or can be, a substitute for faith: we have to admit that we cannot demonstrate our conclusions with the certainty of the mathematician; but we maintain that that is because we are attempting a higher and more difficult task. We hold that it is only by maintaining the belief in God that we can find any adequate ground for the discoveries of the man of science, the experiences of the artist, or the character of the saint. We hold that in that belief all the greatest activities of man have their reasoned foundation, and that, so far from defending an obsolete and discredited cause, we are the only people who offer any reasonable explanation of human life. Our explanation is not complete, and there are gaps which we can only very tentatively fill; but at least it proceeds on the lines

which govern scientific thought and its main contention is unaffected by our failures either of thinking or of practice.

It is a theory tested by the only possible method: by its power to stimulate all the higher powers of man, and to encourage him to seek for beauty, for goodness and for truth, to satisfy his intellect and, in a word, to make sense of life. A doctrine is not true simply because it is beautiful and helpful, but there is far less reason to believe in its truth merely because it is ugly and devitalising. Until it is proved that life has no meaning, we shall continue to believe in the only faith in which that meaning is to be found, and we shall courteously but firmly reject the doctrine that it is only simpletons and fools who seek for an explanation of the world which attempts to do justice to those qualities which we all hold sacred.

The beetles which lived in the eight-day clock became pessimists when they realised that the clock was running down: it is even said that they then adopted black as their peculiar colour to match the gloom of their conclusions. But they had omitted

to notice that the clock was wound up week by week: and they have not earned in history the credit of profound thinkers.

I have left till the last what is perhaps the strongest reason for disbelief in God, or rather that which weighs most with the ordinary man—the sin and suffering of the world. I remember during the war an old workman saying to me, as we spoke of the miseries of that time, “It hardly seems, sir, as if there could be a God, does it?” and that feeling, sometimes unacknowledged and sometimes avowed, is very prevalent to-day.

It would be ridiculous in so slight a work as this to attempt to deal exhaustively with the problem of evil: some suggestions will be offered on the subject later on: for the moment it will be enough to say that a religious man sees in the general dissatisfaction with the world's condition a strong argument for the faith which is in him. Man is judging the world by a definite and high standard: whence is that standard derived? There is a very real meaning in the phrase “divine discontent,” and in the mere fact that that discontent

is to-day so real and so widespread lies the greatest hope for the world's future.

It has never been a religious, or at any rate not a Christian, doctrine that God will make the world perfect by His own direct action, nor would there be any conceivable moral value in such an act. The question, as between the theist and the atheist, is whether the world is to be saved by the unaided efforts of man or by his co-operation with the God Who made him : we see in man's striving towards better things a clear indication that he is seeking to be what he was meant to be, and it is a primary part of our contention that the word "meant" has no value whatever in a purposeless universe. It is therefore to the question of purpose that we must first turn. We shall approach it from several angles and with a certain amount of necessary repetition, for it is vital for the religious man to insist on an answer to the questions, Has the world a purpose? If so, where is that purpose to be found? If not, what is the justification for any of our activities, or indeed for any arguments at all?

## CHAPTER II

### OF THE NECESSITY OF THE INQUIRY

IT may seem necessary to stress the importance of the question. It might have been thought that no one could doubt that it was inevitable for a thinking man to make up his mind on a matter of such vital concern. But of late years there has been a tendency to leave it an open question and to assume that after all it does not very much matter. Conduct, we are told, is the important thing, and the writer who declared that conduct was "nine-tenths of life" has been thought to have produced a brilliant epigram, which put religion once for all in its right place.

No idea could be more foolish : conduct is obviously not nine-tenths but the whole of life, but that does not tell us how "good conduct" is to be secured. Life must be lived upon a theory, and religion, as this little book will suggest, provides the only working theory at present before the world. Like other theories it must be tested by its results, but it has no reason to shrink from the test.

The British, or rather the English, nation has a hearty dislike for what is called abstract

thinking, but a moment's consideration will show that this is a foolish prejudice. For a sport-loving people it will perhaps be simplest to illustrate the fallacy from a familiar field. A game of cricket or football is won by the side which scores the most runs or the most goals ; but no lover of sport will doubt that, other things being equal, it is the side which has the most science in its play, or, in other words, the better theory, which is most likely to succeed. A good life may no doubt be lived upon a wrong theory, and no one nowadays attempts to deny the excellence of the lives of many heathen or many atheists ; but that is no more surprising than the occasional successes of an athlete with an unorthodox style : we shall continue to maintain, and we have all experience behind us in maintaining, that sound theory is the only reasonable foundation of sound practice. The eccentric genius may afford to despise rules, but for the ordinary man the attempt is disastrous.

We may then agree that it is a man's obvious duty to try to reach a conclusion on the question whether religious belief does or does not tend to produce the practical results aimed at by all men of good will, and to be able



to give some reasons for the conclusion he has reached. This " practical " argument will seem to many the most important, but we ought, as thinking beings, to remember that religion is not only concerned with conduct, but with truth as an end in itself ; and we ought to be interested in the question whether, from that point of view, religious belief provides an adequate ground for scientific discovery and artistic experience as well as for moral progress. We Christians hold that there is a spiritual background not only to life but to learning ; theology has been rightly described as *scientia scientiarum*, the science of sciences—because the one thing which every man most needs to have is a right conception of his place in the universe, or, in other words, of his relation to God.

## CHAPTER III

### OF THE METHODS OF APPROACH TO IT

THERE are clearly two ways in which our question can be approached—the practical and the theoretical. No one can deny that the former is the simpler and the more attractive road. Christianity, to take the religion of which we know most, made its first appeal to the heart rather than the mind : if you read the earliest sermons in the Acts of the Apostles you will see that they all contain a reference to the forgiveness of sins, and it was this doctrine, which sounds to us like a platitude, which first drew adherents to the gospel—being, in fact, the “ good news ” which they wished to hear. We shall not appreciate it unless we remember that neither Jews nor Greeks believed that sins could be forgiven : the one thought that the sins of the fathers were inevitably visited upon their children, and the other that a curse might rest on a whole family until the price was paid. No doubt some thinkers in both races had questioned this belief, but it was deep-rooted in the popular mind, so that a preacher who could assure them that sins could be forgiven

was certain of a welcome. It is needless to point out that moral progress is almost impossible for those who believe that they are condemned as guilty for sins not their own.

Once more, we know that it was the love of Christians for one another, manifest in their lives, which did most to convert the heathen world, just as it is still the fruits of Christianity, shown in the unselfish lives of doctors and missionaries, which supply the strongest evidence for its truth both in India and in China. The practice of a true religion is of infinitely more effect than its most eloquent preaching.

In the same way, the ordinary man of to-day is attracted to religion by the good lives of those who practise it, and repelled by the mediocre performance of many who profess and call themselves Christians. A strong line taken by the Church on an obvious moral issue is of more convincing value than treatises which are too often read only by the converted.

It must be said that in two respects the average man fails to do justice to the Christianity of his day. He does not realise how much of the ordinary every-day "good

works " of the community are in fact done by Christian people in the inspiration of their religion : the activities of the parson and of the " church workers " in clubs and guilds and so on are too often taken for granted : it is a compliment that it should be so, but it prevents their work from having its full evidential value. And, secondly, he naturally, but illogically, blames Christianity for the lives of those who are only nominally Christian. This is a point to which we shall have to return : for the present it need only be said that there is no sort of reason why the mere profession of Christianity should be expected to change a life, and that any religion has a right to be judged by its effect on those who take it seriously.

For these reasons the most obvious course for one who wishes to commend the belief in God would seem to be to concentrate on the good effects which such a belief, and in particular the belief in the God Whom Christ preached, has had and still has on human life, and to endeavour to show how we ourselves can share in their benefits. This is a very important piece of evidence, but there are good reasons why it should not be taken first.

In the first place our illustrations will have shown how impossible it really is to separate theory and practice. If sins are indeed forgiven to those who truly repent, it can only be because there is a God Who forgives them : if Christians showed, or show, brotherly love towards one another, it is because they believe in the common Fatherhood of God. In other words, the morality which Christ preached was, and is, based upon certain definite doctrines about God and man : the two " great commandments " which he gave can both be found in the Old Testament : what was new in his teaching was precisely that revelation of God's nature which he gave both in word and deed. To attempt to separate the two is to be false to all the evidence which we possess.

Again, it is no good to build up the most satisfactory moral fabric on foundations which are insecure : if Christian morals are based on a mistake, the sooner we know it the better : we might try to defend them on grounds of mere expediency, but that is not, and has never been, the Christian position ; we claim that they represent the will of God, and must not be afraid to face all that that claim implies.

Finally—and this is the most important point—we live in an age which is increasingly indisposed to believe in God at all, and this fact, felt in the intellectual atmosphere of our time, has its effect even on those who are not naturally predisposed to doubt. Centuries bear characters of their own ; and if the eighteenth century was the age of reason and the nineteenth of a somewhat unthinking prosperity, the twentieth is the century of doubt. You, who read this book, wish for certainties, and are perhaps disposed to rest on the certainties of science rather than on what you think the uncertainties of faith. It is the object of this little book to endeavour to reassure you : to show that the Christian faith, so far from being an outworn superstition, is a real attempt to solve the mysteries of life and a faith which no thinking man need be ashamed to hold. It will go further, and maintain that a belief in God is the sole foundation of all rational thought about the world.

We shall first try, perhaps at the cost of some repetition, to establish the theory, and shall then turn to the practical effects which such a theory ought to have upon our lives.

In dealing with so vast a subject it is inevitable that some parts of the argument should interest one type of reader more than another : but all readers of good will should remember how diverse are the difficulties which keep men from belief, and will forgive the discussion of points which to themselves may seem so obvious as to need no demonstration.

Each section is introduced by a short paragraph which indicates its general drift, so that it is easy, for those who wish, to pass on to something which may interest them more.

## CHAPTER IV

THAT NO EXPLANATION OF THE UNIVERSE IS  
POSSIBLE EXCEPT IN TERMS OF PURPOSE

BEFORE our discussion begins, it will be well to set down what it is that we are trying to prove: we are far from wishing to suggest that those who do not agree with us are fools or knaves, and are bold enough to ask that a similar courtesy may be extended to us. Our cause is at the moment an unpopular one, and for some of its unpopularity we are ourselves to blame; but it has been truly said that "majorities, especially respectable ones, are nine times out of ten in the wrong": we ask only for a fair hearing: if we assume that our opponents are honest seekers after truth, we ask them to believe that we seek it also.

It so happens that I began the task of writing this book on a ship which was passing the coast of Asia Minor: on our starboard bow lay Patmos, where, according to tradition, St. John saw the vision which revealed to him the divine meaning of the world. If it is not easy for us to believe in such a message to-day, we should not suppose that it was not difficult for him. He was an exile for the



testimony of the truth : he saw the forces of evil impregnably entrenched upon the seven hills of Rome : he heard the voices of the martyrs crying " How long ? " His difficulties were not ours, and we cannot give the answer which he gave ; but it is a great mistake to brush aside the testimony of the great men who in all the ages have affirmed their belief in God as if they were shallow thinkers content with an easy solution of a problem which they had not faced. The present age is not the first which has learnt to think, and its achievements are not so glorious as to command us to accept without question its facile rejection of the wisdom of the past.

But it was not entirely of St. John that I was thinking as Patmos faded into the distance and we continued our course. I was rather thinking of a new illustration of that ancient argument from design which inevitably plays so large a part in any discussion of the central problems of human existence. Here was our ship, in itself a wonderful testimony to the creative powers of man : on board some three hundred passengers, in the main unknown to one another before the cruise began : on all sides of us the sea, a lovely dark blue save

where the wind stirred the white horses and the vessel churned it into a creamy foam. And I said to myself, Can there be any doubt which of the two presents the truer picture of the world—the sea or the ship which it bears? The one has purpose written in its every line: in its perfect adequacy to combat the dangers of its voyage and to secure the comfort of its passengers: and their presence has the same explanation, for, varied though their purposes may be, none of them is there by chance: from the captain to the stoker every soul on board must explain his presence in terms of purpose, just as every fitting in the ship finds its meaning therein.

And the sea—whatever the poets may sing, and however they may endow it with human thoughts and feelings, it must remain the supreme example of an entity which has no meaning and no purpose of its own. Its beauty means nothing in and for itself: its peace and its anger are alike fictions of the imagination.

There, as it seems to me, is the choice which we have to make: can we believe that the world is like the sea, at the mercy of every wind that blows, a meaningless and a purpose-

less place ; or is it rather, like the ship which sails it, informed throughout with purpose ?

It appears to me impossible for any sane man to doubt which answer we ought to give ; it matters nothing for our present purpose what the object of the cruise may be : instead of a blameless party of Hellenic travellers we might have been a pirate ship, ploughing under more favourable conditions those same waters which so many pirates have ploughed before : they had their purpose, as we have, and would illustrate my point as well. For if the world is to be explained in terms of purpose, it is plain that behind it must be Mind ; for we know of no other place in which purposes can be formed, and Mind is for us the hall-mark of personality. It may, or may not, be heresy to speak of God as a Person, but it would seem demonstrably true that it is only in terms of personality that He can be conceived, or spoken of, at all.

To those who put to us the question, Can we believe in God ? it is fair to retort with the question, Can we believe in a world which has no purpose ? and can purpose exist in a world left lonely of a God ?

Religious people generally have been far too ready to allow themselves to be forced into a defensive position, which is as bad strategy in controversy as it is in warfare: they are thus compelled to meet the difficulties which beset any solution of the problems of the universe, as well as those inherent in their own. They should be prepared to carry the war into the enemy's camp. Is it really as simple as it sounds to deny or even to question the existence of a Creator? Those who think it is should be forced to think out what their position involves, and they will find that it involves the denial of any real basis for scientific thought as well as the denial of any absolute standards either in art or morals.

There was profound wisdom in the Aristophanic jest that when Zeus is expelled from heaven mere chance is King,<sup>1</sup>

*Διὸς βασιλεύει τὸν Δί' ἐξεληλακώς*

and chance provides no secure basis for any of the achievements of man: it must be repeated that it is not only morality which expires in such a world, not only the Arts which

<sup>1</sup> The word really means a whirl of atoms, but the pun is untranslatable.

lose their *raison d'être*: science can only maintain itself by a flagrant breach of logic, for in a universe over which Chance really presided there would be no possible reason for the working of cause and effect. Our opponents are not really honest with us: though they are anxious to banish the God Who governs our conduct, they are very ready, and very creditably ready, to seek for a God Who will guarantee our mental processes. For Chance will not do it, nor any impersonal and non-thinking Power. Their attitude is very creditable to their hearts, for the love of Truth is a spiritual quality of a high order; but it does little credit to their heads, and the orthodox believer, who is so often criticised for his distrust of reason, may fairly claim that in this respect he serves reason more loyally than his critics. We have a right to demand that the alternative should be fairly put before the public: to deny the possibility of any solution is honest, though it is a confession of despair; what is *not* honest is dogmatically to deny the existence of God, and then to postulate just so many of the divine attributes as may suit the particular atheists for their own argumentative

purposes. Chance has as much right to demand loyalty and not lip-service from his followers as any god in the Pantheon: as a matter of fact the poor deity hardly receives even lip-service, for most avowed atheists are anxious to conceal from the public the true nature of the divinity whom they are bound to propose for the acceptance of the world.

## CHAPTER V

### OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE QUESTION TO ANY THINKING MAN

LET us pause for a moment to reflect on the momentous question raised in the last pages, and to assure ourselves that we are approaching it in the right temper. If you sincerely believe that there is no purpose behind human life, you will, no doubt, for a long time continue to act as if there were, just as people who have given up the Christian faith continue, for a time at least, to practise Christian morality. But if mankind as a whole lost its belief in purpose, chaos would inevitably follow. This is so obvious that those who do not believe in God try to find some other foundation for their belief in purpose.

We shall have to try to examine their attempts, which may lead us into difficult intellectual country: for the moment we need only say that a belief in a directing God supplies a simple answer. To say that an answer is simple does not imply that it is true; but it is sometimes forgotten that it is no reason for supposing it to be false.

Let us repeat then that there can be no question so important as this to the whole race of mankind: on the answer given to it must depend our whole conception of the value of human life and of all those subordinate values which we attach to our qualities and our achievements. If we were forced to confess that there was no God Whose purpose gave a meaning to our efforts and Whose character guaranteed their utility, we should no doubt continue to call things and people beautiful and good, but our words would have lost their real meaning. A paper currency has a meaning and a value of its own, and a certain limited validity; but gold has its value all the world over: in the same way the judgments which we believe to be an echo of the divine judgment have a validity which must be unattainable for those who believe that man, and man's opinion, is the only possible measure of all things.

In approaching so momentous a topic it might have been hoped that men would do their best to lay aside all prejudice, and to discuss it with that single desire for truth which so great a problem demands.



It is needless to remark that this hope has not been fulfilled: there is no subject on which disputes have aroused so much passion or one in which the disputants have shown so little charity for their opponents. There was a time, not long ago, when to deny or even to doubt the existence of God was denounced as the sure sign of immorality: the modern tendency is to assume that a belief in Him is the proof of an unwillingness to face fact, and an incapacity to appreciate argument.

Both these tendencies are equally false and equally deplorable. In our investigation we may not indeed reach certainty—and indeed a belief which amounts to certainty has no proper claims to the title—but we shall at any rate try to approach it as genuine seekers after truth. To be unprejudiced in such a matter is literally impossible: our early training implanted in us judgments which were formed before we appreciated the reasons on which they were based, and that is what a prejudice literally means: our experience of life has confirmed these prejudices or discounted them, and sometimes the reaction has been

as unreasoned as the original belief: our dispositions inevitably tend in one direction or the other and unconsciously bias our judgment: but at least we shall not assume that those who differ from us are necessarily guilty of wilful stupidity or of moral blindness.

Fair is the prize, as Socrates once said, and great the hope, and there at once our friend the enemy will object that a seeker after truth has no business with hopes: his only duty is to find out what is true. But this is surely to ask too much of human nature: the great scientist must believe that Truth is worth pursuing, and therefore pursue it hopefully: he is allowed to hope that the facts which he investigates will bear out the particular hypothesis which he has formed: he may not tamper with them, or ignore them when they do not serve his purpose, but he is allowed to hope; and if he finds, as we assuredly shall, that an element of the unknown eludes his grasp, he will legitimately hope that nothing yet to be discovered will invalidate the conclusions he has reached.

It has been said that it would be wiser

if the Creeds began with the words "I hope" instead of "I believe," and there is no reason to object to that suggestion if we remember that any hope which is worthy of the name must have its basis in reason. The man who hopes to inherit a fortune is merely silly if he has no sort of reason to expect it: the mere possession of a lottery ticket gives him a fairly reasonable basis, but he is far from being the type of the hopeful man. For the symbol of hope is an anchor, and an anchor demands solid ground if it is to do its characteristic work.

## CHAPTER VI

### OF SOME ATTEMPTS WHICH HAVE BEEN MADE TO FIND PURPOSE IN THE WORLD WITH- OUT A BELIEF IN GOD

THIS section will inevitably be rather difficult reading, for philosophers naturally use a language of their own, but if we remember that "teleology" means a belief in purpose we shall find it easier. Those who do not wish to go into the matter in detail may be content to ask themselves these three questions :

(1) Is it really conceivable that the world as we know it is the result of chance? (2) If it has "evolved" a purpose of its own, must not that purpose have really been there all the time? and in that case (3) How did it come there?

Philosophy at the present time seems to be ploughing rather a barren furrow. Some philosophies, such as Pragmatism and Communism, seem to be merely means of getting things done, and to have renounced the theoretic interest. Others, which retain that interest, devote themselves to the logical analysis of propositions and deny

that any knowledge about the condition of the universe or any explanation of the world-processes as a whole is possible for man.

By every test which we are capable of applying, rationality implies a purpose, and purpose, so far as we know, can only exist in a purposing mind. It is perhaps possible to conceive an organism which has its purpose in itself, but it should be remembered that the conception has no external warrant. It is easy to imagine the scorn which would be heaped upon a religious thinker who invoked such a conception to justify his belief; but the champions of disbelief enjoy a larger liberty.

We can at least say that religion has all experience and all analogy on its side when it argues from a world in which purpose dictates all reasoned action to a purpose behind the world so made; and when it asks its critics for a plain answer to the questions What is meant by a purpose divorced from mind? and What is the guarantee of rationality in a purposeless universe?

There have been, and are, philosophers

who have believed themselves to have found a satisfactory answer to the first question ; but the answers which they give seem satisfactory neither to the plain man nor to their philosophical critics.

Hume, for example, who admitted that " whatever cavils may be urged, an orderly world will still be reckoned proof of design or intention," suggested that chance could really be regarded as a satisfactory explanation. He says that given a finite number of particles in an eternal duration, every possible order or position must be tried an infinite number of times : " the world therefore, with all its events, even the most minute, has been produced and destroyed, and will again be produced and destroyed without any bounds and limitations."

To this the plain man remarks that as an explanation, for instance, of Shakespeare's plays, he prefers the explanation that the poet's mind was at work, to that which suggests that the plays as they stand are the result of one of the innumerable chance combinations of the letters which compose them. He may recall the fable

of the mice in the grand piano whose thinkers slowly taught them the laws of causation, until they became determinists as they observed that each motion of the wires produced a predestined effect, but were unable to grasp the conception that someone was playing the piano all the time.

The philosophical objection to Hume's theory is simple and devastating: why should we assume a *finite* number of particles and an *infinite* duration of time? If both were infinite, as they should logically be, no calculation of probability could conceivably arise. Things *might* happen as they have, but we should be no nearer to an explanation.

Another more modern, and more serious, attempt to combine belief in a purposeful universe with disbelief in a purposeful creator goes under the name of "emergent evolution." This has more attraction for the plain man, who is disposed to believe that Darwin's discovery of evolution by natural selection provides a complete answer to the riddle of the universe. But the philosopher will not allow him so easy

an escape. Evolution depends on reaction to environment, and nature as a whole, which can have no environment, can therefore not evolve. "The order of nature cannot have evolved, because it is the condition of there being any environment at all."

This is really a more learned way of stating what the plain man will instinctively grant, that the qualities which enable an acorn to grow into an oak must have been there before the process began. If chaos could evolve into cosmos, it cannot originally have been so chaotic as we supposed.

The Dean of St. Paul's has well summed up the arguments for the teleological point of view, which sees in purpose one of the strongest arguments for the belief in God. We start, he says, with an experience of the general character of the universe.

There is, first, the impression of an order which is both rational and sublime; there is, secondly, the fact that the universe, when interrogated by reason, seems to be a coherent system; and there is, thirdly, the fact that this system is in motion and that it brings to birth values, higher types of existence, in the course of its change; and there is, fourthly, the consideration that the search for



explanation and understanding of existence can never reach a conclusion which will satisfy us unless we can conceive it as a teleological order, for only by such an insight can we obtain any answer to the question Why? . . . Any non-teleological view of evolution must be in the long run self-contradictory.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matthews, *The Purpose of God*, pp. 64, 105.

## CHAPTER VII

THAT IF THE UNIVERSE IS A REASONABLE PLACE  
WE MUST TRY TO FOLLOW REASON AS  
FAR AS IT WILL TAKE US

PEOPLE so often speak as if religion were an "unreasonable" thing that it is worth while to emphasise that this is the opposite of the truth. Our argument so far has tended to show that the belief in God is the only obvious ground for believing in the "reasonableness" of the world, for a world without purpose would be a world without reason, and all true religion is reasonable. That is not to say that reason will carry us the whole way, but that it can, and must, be trusted in its own sphere. The man who said "I believe because it is impossible" did not mean that faith was concerned with impossibilities, but that, in regions where proof is impossible and reason out of its depth, faith is the only ground for any belief—and that is obviously true.

I *believe* that the sun will rise to-morrow because there is no means of proving it, and many of our actions inevitably depend upon beliefs which we cannot logically

demonstrate. We do not *know* that our friends love us : we do not *know* that England is a country worth dying for : it is perfectly right to test such beliefs by any reasonable means, but there is nothing "unreasonable" in holding them without definite proof.

When we come to questions involving such ideas as "infinity," it is clear that reason must break down and we must call imagination to our aid. The poets can express what "reasonable" men cannot, but the truths which they teach do not conflict with reason.

But our present purpose is to emphasise the reasonableness of true religion. There is much "unreason" about : quack remedies, mascots, fortune-tellers flourish and abound ; and superstition and magic are by no means only popular in religious circles. We ought definitely to follow reason as far as it will carry us : to acknowledge as definitely that it cannot tell us all that we should wish to know, but to remember that, as truth must be a coherent thing, no one part of it can contradict another.

With this thought in our mind let us turn

back to history, and see how our generation has come to a disbelief in reason from which it is one of the duties of religion to save us.

If the universe is a reasonable place, which, as we have already suggested, can only be reasonably assumed by those who see behind it a creative Mind, we must be right to follow our reason, so far as it will lead us, in the task of interpretation. The truth, we must repeat, cannot contradict our reason; but it is often forgotten by rationalists that we have no grounds for expecting that our unaided reason will carry us the whole way.

In his Introduction to the second (?) Book of the *Faery Queene*, Spenser makes gentle fun of those who demand that he should prove the existence of that famous antique land of Faerie

Which you so much do boast and yet no where can  
show.

His answer is twofold. In the first place, he says, the discoveries which are continually being made serve as a warning against undue scepticism: "Who ever

heard of the Indian Peru " until explorers proved its existence to be a fact? and day by day new regions are being added to the map of the world. And so, secondly, he asks

Why then should witlesse man so much misdeeme  
That nothing is but that which he can see ?

His argument, though playful in its form, has behind it a core of hard sense which is as applicable to our present time as to the amazing century in which he wrote. Both ages have seen discoveries undreamt of by earlier generations: both need to be reminded, in face of the astounding achievements of man, how vast is the field yet remaining unexplored.

Those who are most anxious to acclaim the triumphs of reason are bound to confess that we are continually forced to confess our ignorance: it is quite legitimate to believe that this ignorance will one day be overcome; but such a faith is quite as *undemonstrable* as that of a Christian, which indeed it most resembles. No one hesitates, for instance, to employ a "water diviner" in spite of his utter ignorance of the laws which govern his working.

Reason has for much of its material to depend on the evidence of the senses, and every day reminds us that this material is continually shifting. When we speak of what "can be seen" or "can be heard," we used to mean what was obvious to the naked eye or the unaided ear: modern discoveries have extended the ranges of the senses in a way as unexpected and inconceivable to civilised man as are the revelations of the telescope and microscope to the primitive savage. Nor is there any reason why the process should come to an end. But it is a curious lack of logic to found on these discoveries the belief that no mysteries yet remain.

In my young days it was still fashionable to sneer at the eighteenth century as the "age of reason." Its reliance on good sense was not counted to it for righteousness, and we were encouraged to laugh at those poets who summoned Inspiration to descend, but in such frigid and formal accents that it was clear that they neither expected nor desired her appearance. The reign of Reason seemed to have been eclipsed by the brilliant galaxy of poets who

ennobled the dawn of the succeeding century.

But no one nowadays thinks of the nineteenth century as the age of romance: prosperity is an unromantic thing and rapidly produces conditions unfavourable to abstract thought of any kind; as we look back we see the great poets such as Tennyson and Browning, and the prophets like Carlyle, being slowly overwhelmed by a flood of materialism and their teaching forgotten. It is not that the nineteenth century, towards its close, was thinking wrong, but that it was too busy in making money to think coherently at all. Clough described its mental position in his sketch of the prosperous merchant

If there be God, the tradesman thinks,  
It matters very little,  
For I and mine, thank somebody,  
Are not in want of victual.

When, with the new century, adversity descended upon such a society, it is not surprising that the intellectual equipment which might have combated it was lacking. A vague faith had sprung up that evolution guaranteed a sure and steady progress to-

wards the promised land, and the discovery that there was no real Gospel of Evolution came as a chill surprise.

No doubt the world ought not to have been surprised: it had been, to some extent, the victim of a phrase: "the survival of the fittest" sounded full of promise, and it was very slowly, and with much disappointment, that the world came to realise that the only "fitness" guaranteed was fitness to survive in a material struggle for existence, and that the qualities so implied were not by any means the most desirable. The large fish which has eaten all its competitors is no more attractive than the big business man who has successfully ruined his rivals.

The world had so long ceased to think for itself that it sought blindly for a scape-goat and turned, somewhat unjustly, on religion, to which it had paid little attention in the days of its prosperity. Those who had been very unwilling to show any practical gratitude to God when things went well were the first to blame Him when they went wrong. No doubt religion ought to have had the answer ready, but it must



confessed that it had done little to prepare for the evil day. The Church in this country had been setting its own house in order: it had been skirmishing with science on the outskirts of the field of battle, but it had not been preparing itself for that ultimate conflict on the existence of God which is the real Armageddon of the spirit. A prosperous world had not thought the doctrine worth denying, and so when the world turned to it in its distress, or on it in its anger, the Church had no answer prepared: it offered to palliate the misfortunes of the time, but was not intellectually ready to take up the challenge.

Disappointed and disillusioned, the world turned to science: science had done so much for it that it seemed impossible that it should not do more, and science replied, it may be epigrammatically said, by offering it the Brave New World of Mr. Aldous Huxley. The world may not be very clever, but it had deepseated in it both decency and common-sense, and it turned from the picture with justifiable disgust.

Having rejected God, and been rebuffed by science, it shows signs of pinning its

faith on Man; but it is no exaggeration to say that Man, as we see him in the international field to-day, demands a more robust faith in his worshippers than any for which Christians have ever dared to ask. Disappointed once more, the average man is not unnaturally disposed to believe that there is nothing worth believing: this attitude has at least the advantage that it involves no strain upon the intellect and frees those who hold it from any moral obligations which they may wish to repudiate.

In this unhappy situation it is surely worth while considering whether we should not revise our opinion of the eighteenth century and agree with it that reason is the surest guide which we possess. We might do worse than return to one of its most characteristic figures, Bishop Butler, whose opponents have never questioned either his intellectual sanity or that "unswerving zeal for truth" which is claimed for him by Mr. Gladstone in the epitaph written for Durham Cathedral.

Bishop Butler did not claim that the existence of God could be demonstrated, but that, as probability is the guide of life,

such a belief was shown to be probable by "analogy to the course and conduct of nature." He takes it for granted that there is an intelligent Author of nature and natural Governor of the world : "this assumption was not questioned by the Deists, against whom his work was directed : in his opinion it has been often proved with accumulated evidence ; from this argument of analogy and final causes ; from abstract reasonings ; from the most ancient tradition and testimony, and from the general consent of mankind."

From him therefore we shall get no direct demonstration of the existence of God, which he assumed ; his object was to prove the credibility of Christianity, and that object he assuredly accomplished. He aimed at producing "a serious apprehension that Christianity may be true," which is as sorely needed in this age as in his own ; for he rightly felt that "such an apprehension would lay persons under the strictest obligations of a serious regard to it, throughout the whole of their life—a regard not the same exactly, but in many respects nearly the same, with what a full conviction of its truth would lay them under."

If this "serious apprehension" is lacking to-day, it is not because new facts have been discovered which overthrow Butler's argument, or any alternative hypothesis offered to explain the world: it is rather from mental *inertia* and from that unreasoned and unreasoning despair of reason which is one of the deadliest forms which mental *inertia* can take.

There are many staunch defenders of Christianity who would be only too glad to barter any hopes that they may have of a demonstration of God's existence calculated to convince the unbeliever for the certainty of an unprejudiced hearing of the case. From an intellectual standpoint, Christianity suffers not from attempts at disproof, but from precisely that unwillingness to listen to, or to trust, argument which Butler hoped to dispel.

## CHAPTER VIII

THAT WE ARE RIGHT TO SEEK FOR SOME  
EXPLANATION OF THE WORLD IN WHICH  
WE FIND OURSELVES

No one in principle would deny this, but very few people really make the attempt. If we were honest with ourselves, we should admit that we give extremely little time to real thought about so great a problem. Most of us were brought up with a vague and unquestioning belief in God: some of us still hold that belief without any real attempt to explain it to ourselves. We believe for the very good reason that other people better and wiser than ourselves seem to be convinced. Though that is, as far as it goes, a very good reason indeed, it is not really good enough; for it can be countered by the argument that other people, also good and wise, seem to get on quite happily without it.

For it is obviously true that the belief is very far from being unquestioned, and if we have no adequate grounds for our conviction it will gradually come to seem to us first doubtful, secondly improbable, and thirdly unimportant.

We should remember that many people abandon their belief in God because they have never taken the trouble to think out either what it involves or what the alternative should be. Mental laziness does much more harm than the most violent anti-religious arguments.

Samuel Butler once said, in parody of Tennyson,

There lives more doubt in honest faith,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

That is really an under-statement, for much more than "half the creeds" are recited by people who have never taken the trouble to understand them. But it could be equally wrong to imagine that all "doubt" is necessarily "honest" in the sense that it results from thought and not from mere laziness.

It is the main purpose of this book to suggest that Christians should set an example of readiness to think: they have everything to gain by doing so, for the more we think, the more we shall find that thought leads us along the road which leads to God. Mere thought will not take us all the way, for God deals with the whole man,

and not with man as a mere "thinking animal"; but it is a disastrous mistake, and one little short of blasphemy, to suppose that the brains which He has given us are not to be used in His service. He must mean us, so far as we can, to understand the world in which He has placed us: to give up the effort is to surrender some of our birthright.

Belief in God has its origin in an attempt to explain the world in which we find ourselves, and, whether the attempt be successful or not, it is certainly one which it is creditable to make. To seek for explanations is a characteristic of the human race: not unique in itself, but unique in its universality, and growing more marked as the intelligence of the race progresses. The dog no doubt seeks for some explanations and does his best to find them: he is worried by the preparations for his master's departure, whether or not he connects effects with causes; but if he is confronted with a more difficult problem—as, for instance, the appearance of his natural face in a glass—he as clearly gives it up with no attempt at inquiry.

In the same way uneducated man makes comparatively few attempts at explanation: he regards the prehistoric monuments near which he may live with the mildest interest, and is satisfied with the most unreasonable and simplest explanations. As he rises in the scale of intelligence he pursues his researches with more zeal, and is not satisfied until he has found what he regards as a reasonable explanation. It may not be logical to infer from this existence of a desire for an explanation that such an explanation can really be found; but the universality of the demand, on the part of the most reasonable of created beings, is a phenomenon which the apostles of reason cannot afford to neglect. If Chance persistently leads us down a blind alley, it is acting with a purposeful energy which its name would seem to deny.

And when we begin to seek for explanations, it is, as has already been hinted, only in the existence of purpose that any satisfactory explanation can be found. When one stands, as I have frequently been standing of late, before some creation of prehistoric man, one's reason is satisfied



when one can form a plausible guess what purpose these early builders had in mind : even if the precise reason for some particular construction eludes one, as in the peculiar construction of the walls of Homeric Troy, we are perfectly confident that it is our knowledge which is at fault, and that it served some purpose which we cannot at present discover.

How different is the case when we are dealing with some fantastic conglomeration of rocks wherein man has had no hand ! We cease to seek for purpose and are content with the theory of accident. The earthquake which may have caused them belongs to no scheme of purpose which we can conceive : we come no nearer to an explanation than the vague belief that

Plagues and earthquakes break not heaven's design :

the design may, and we believe must, exist, but for us it remains inexplicable.

The question which has to be faced is not whether the world is wholly explicable, but whether it is as a whole so patently inexplicable that the search for an explanation is foredoomed to failure. It does

not seem a very heroic attitude to refuse the attempt, as our critics wish us to do; and to suggest that no explanation is worth giving which does not obviously cover all the facts is to deny the whole process by which scientific knowledge grows.

The common assumption that a belief in God is necessarily inconsistent with freedom of thought is ridiculously at variance with the truth: it would be truer to say that without some such presupposition all coherent thought is impossible. We have the conception of cause and effect and are able in detail to verify it, but our discoveries do not carry in themselves any proof of absolute validity. All our knowledge of nature, for example, is based on an assumption of its uniformity which we have no sort of means of proving. Plato's myth of the prisoners in a cave, or Lewis Carroll's picture of a Looking-Glass world, remind us that we are dealing with phenomena, with things seen, and not things absolutely real. We need the assurance that our conclusions, though not the whole truth, are not inconsistent with it and *that* security cannot be found in a chance-made universe.

If Mind has not played a part, and indeed the controlling part, in its construction, there can be no sort of guarantee that the conclusions of our particular minds have any validity at all, and it must be repeated that our experience tells us nothing of mind apart from personality. It is permissible of course to guess that an impersonal power may show those characteristics which we inevitably associate with personality alone ; but it is preposterous to speak as if such a guess were scientific, and to demand that we should, in the name of reason, abandon the presumption which alone make reason reasonable.

## CHAPTER IX

### THAT IT IS THE VASTNESS OF THE UNIVERSE WHICH DISCOURAGES US FROM BELIEF

OUR argument, so far as it has gone, has suggested that there is very strong reason to believe in a Purpose behind the world and that this Purpose can only exist in the mind of God. The argument is so simple and so obvious that it is no surprise to find that this belief has been practically universal in past ages : we have to consider why in our own day it is so much discredited.

The first reason is one which is not in itself intellectual, though it has a very great influence on our thought. It is only of late years that the vastness of the universe has become a commonplace in the mind of the average man. In old days those who thought seriously have of course realised the fact, though their horizons have been indefinitely enlarged ; but, as we have already said, serious thinkers are few. To-day the man in the street is familiar with the staggering figures in which science shows the age of the world and the smallness of our own planet. When he is told that the earth may be fairly represented

in comparison with the universe by a small speck floating under the dome of Victoria Station, he receives a mental shock from which it takes him long to recover.

Put bluntly, the questions which agitate him are something as follows : Is it really conceivable that God can concern Himself with so very small a place ? Does not all religion give the earth an absurdly exaggerated importance in the scheme of things ? Can it be " worth while " for God to have sent His Son to so insignificant a planet ? and, still more, can we really believe that our own short and uneventful lives are a matter of interest to the Creator of all things ?

The Christian answers all these questions in the affirmative ; but it is clear that he has to face a much more serious problem than in the days when we knew nothing of any other planet, except that it shone in the sky, and very little of the world outside the small part of it which centres round the Mediterranean Sea.

It is useless to imitate the ostrich and refuse to face the facts. When we face them we shall find that they are not as formidable as they seem : the vastness of the universe is in itself

an argument for that Almightyness of its Creator in which we believe, and, if we refuse to be frightened by mere size and hold fast to our belief in Mind or Purpose, we shall see that our possession of a mind and our capacity to appreciate a purpose bring us into a real relationship with the Power which the world reveals. If I can think about the stars, and the stars cannot think about me, I belong to a definitely higher order of creation : I am in kinship with the Mind whose thought brought them into being : and I shall no more be frightened by their existence than I am by the mere existence of the earth on which I tread. After all, there is enough solid matter in our little island of Britain to frighten one who compares it with his own puny size ; but Britain owes everything which makes it real and important not to its substance, but to the men who have lived upon it. Unless all history and all thought are vain, the progress of man is the one thing which gives our world its meaning and its value, and we have no sort of reason to believe that different meanings and different values exist elsewhere.

In other words, the values partially revealed in and to man are the only things

which make the world really intelligible, and to suppose its unintelligibility is to contradict reason.

In its simplest form this difficulty of vastness arises whenever we begin to think of the numbers of human beings who, in any really theistic interpretation of the world, are the objects of God's special care. It is true that there may logically be a God Who does not interest Himself in man, but as all our strongest reasons for a theistic belief are based on human aspirations, such a God must remain a logical possibility, and is not worthy of serious belief. The theist, if he is to be honest, must accept Christ's description of the divine attitude : " the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

He must not shrink from the difficulties inherent in such a belief : he must believe not only that God cares for every individual of the myriads in China or India to-day, but that He has cared, and does care, for every being in whom, since our world began, there has been implanted a reasonable soul.

The thought is sufficient to break down the strongest brain, but when it is regarded as a challenge to faith we can see that it is based

upon a fallacy. It is not reason which fails, but our power of imagination, and that we always knew to be limited. Any crowd on which we look merely as a crowd seems to have no individual characteristics; but we know perfectly well that each member of it has a life of his own, and that it is only our lack of imagination which conceals it from us. We know that if we found ourselves in a remote village of China we should before long come to feel that these units, at first indistinguishable, are perfectly distinct. In the same way, it is only a kind of intellectual snobbery which makes us ready to believe in the great personalities of the past, and unwilling to believe that the serfs and peasants had personal lives quite as real as those of their lords and masters. And if we push the argument still further back and confound ourselves by speculations when human personality and human responsibility begin, we need to remind ourselves that we are wantonly asking questions which it is not for us to answer. The wise old Sir John Mandeville, when confronted with the story of a prodigy, was in the habit of remarking, "Whether this be so or not, I know not, but God knows,"



and we might well adopt his attitude. Questions such as these are in the strictest sense of the word God's business : no sane man can believe in a God Who is not wise nor accept a God Who is not just ; the fact that our wisdom cannot find an answer is no sort of reason for declaring that an answer cannot be found, or an answer which is satisfactory to eternal justice.

The only questions which are relevant to our discussion are these : Do the vast numbers of the human race by their mere existence create a problem so overwhelming as to baffle any conceivable wisdom ? or a problem so complex that no conceivable justice can settle it ? To ask these questions is surely to answer them : our own inability to see the solution is quite irrelevant : it would be as reasonable to doubt the existence of the world because we have no sort of idea how it was made.

Tennyson, in a poem called " Vastness," did full justice to the perplexity which the size of the universe awakens

Spring and Summer and Autumn and Winter, and all  
these old revolutions of earth :  
All new-old revolutions of Empire, change of the tide—  
what is all of it worth ?

What the philosophies, all the sciences, poesy, varying  
voices of prayer ?

All that is noblest, all that is basest, all that is filthy  
with all that is fair ?

What is it all, if we all of us end but in being our own  
corpse-coffins at last ?

Swallow'd in Vastness, lost in Silence, drown'd in the  
depths of a meaningless Past ?

Tennyson found his answer in the existence and the permanence of human love : apart from that, human life is “ but a murmur of gnats in the gloom, a moment's humming of bees in the hive.” The answer may not be put in philosophical form, but it contains a profound truth. To be human is to have the power of loving, and that power must come from the source of all life : can an unloving Power inspire such a gift ? and can a Power capable of such inspiration fail to make real the gift so given ? We shall return again to the consideration of this divine spark within us : for the moment we are content to suggest that any being which is or has been capable of love has in it something which makes it no unfit object for the divine care. In our own infinitesimal experience we know that as soon as we recognise that spark in others we cease to have any doubts of their reality : it is only the narrowness of our experience which

makes us hesitate : every time that we go out of our own narrow circle we widen the borders of our understanding by finding that people who seemed merely to exist have potentialities like our own : all that we have to do is by an effort of imagination to compare or contrast the pettiness of our appreciations with the limitless scope of Infinite Love, and this particular terror of Vastness will be seen as no more formidable than the bogies which used to frighten children on Guy Fawkes day.

This is perhaps the first and most obvious assault which the conception of Vastness makes upon our thinking powers, but it is not the most formidable. It is reinforced by the astronomical figures with which science reveals the size of the universe in contrast to the petty scale of the earth on which we live. The days are long past when we could brush their arguments aside on ecclesiastical authority which was, as we can now see, extremely ill-advised to venture beyond its proper province. We have to face the fact that the universe is inconceivably vast and that, from the point of view of space, our earth is of a ridiculous pettiness.

But when we come to ask what this may rightly be held to prove, we are surprised at the meagreness of the result. There is no scientific warrant for believing mere size to be formidable or even in itself respectable. A man is not overawed by the mere existence of a mountain, but (if he is overawed at all) only by the powers with which his imagination invests it: it never occurs to him to believe that a mountain is of a higher order of creation than himself.

Similarly the stars derive all their imposing grandeur from the fancies spun about them by man's poetic mind: a blazing world which has no life does not become more important from its mere magnitude: it is, very literally, less interesting than a blazing house. The poet Blake was not an imposing figure, but no sane man can doubt that Blake writing

The little stars are lambs, I guess,  
The gentle moon their shepherdess

was far more considerable—in the exact meaning of the word—than the vast worlds which he so playfully described. A child admiring the starry heavens is infinitely more important, by any reasonable standard, than the unreasoning planets which he admires.

It is a sound scientific principle—in fact the principle of all scientific progress—to advance from the known to the unknown and to assume that what is once clearly established by reason will not be contradicted, however much it may be amplified, by what is still to be discovered. We know, and with our present powers can only know, something of the world in which we actually live. If in that world we find clear traces of an agency which we must hold to be divine, nothing to be discovered elsewhere can invalidate our belief. We are not tied to the belief that this earth of ours is the only field of divine operation, but the theistic belief that God cannot lie or cannot contradict Himself is only another way of stating the scientific axiom of the uniformity of nature. If our faith in reason, goodness and truth demands that we should believe God to be wise and just, that same wisdom and that same justice will operate in undiscovered fields of being. If it is a form of intellectual snobbishness to believe that we are ourselves important, but that such importance is impossible for the whole human race, it is sheer imbecility, with no trace of intellect about it, to suppose that something

which we believe on good grounds of experience to be true is invalidated by the mere existence of vast regions in which, so far as we know, no such experience is possible. The second bogey proves, on investigation, to be even less formidable than the first.

## CHAPTER X

THAT A BELIEF IN GOD IS VITAL NOT ONLY FOR  
RELIGION BUT ALSO FOR SCIENCE AND ART

IF we have succeeded in allaying the very natural doubts and fears which are caused by man's appreciation of the vastness of the universe in which he lives, we can return with confidence to our consideration of his concerns, believing that this small world in which we live is both real and important. Whatever realities may exist elsewhere, we believe ourselves to be in touch with realities here and now.

When we deal with the activities of man we shall find that they may be classified under the three headings of Religion, Science and Art, which correspond to the old trinity of Goodness, Truth and Beauty. If we look into the matter we shall find that all of them alike depend for their existence on a belief in God.

This will seem a hard saying to those who think that religion alone is concerned with God, and religious people are much to blame for allowing such a belief to become common. From our point of view the only

real reason for doing anything is that we shall please God by doing so and fulfil the purpose for which we were made. This is every bit as true of the artist or the man of science as it is of the district visitor, and it is a great pity that we have ever allowed it to be forgotten. To seek for Beauty or to seek for Truth is, from our standpoint, to discover what God means us to find, and if He gave us special aptitudes in either direction, it is clearly His Will which we are doing when we develop them.

It ought not therefore to surprise us that these activities depend, as we shall see that they do, on the belief in God.

Science has drifted far away from religion, and comparatively few men of science regard their pursuit of truth as a divine mission ; this is very largely our fault, and we should make amends by showing our readiness to recognise that, even when they are most blatant in their denials, they are often inspired by a real desire for truth. Often, but not always, for the fault is not all on one side, and a certain amount of what is called Free Thought is really an insistence that no one should think in a religious way.



Some such refusals to believe in God are prompted by excellent and very reasonable motives, but some of them are caused by an intellectual obtuseness which has nothing to commend it : it would be a great step forward if we could view our opponents not as the ruthless and unanswerable logicians which we sometimes suppose them to be, but as honest seekers after truth who have allowed the admitted difficulties of the subject and the natural prejudices of the past to force them into assertions or denials with which logic has nothing to do. The Christian has nothing to fear from the truth, for it was "into all the truth" that Christ promised that his Spirit should be the guide.

If science were to insist, as it was inclined to do two generations ago, on the rejection of any but a materialistic explanation of the world, it would be true to say that not it, but religion, was the true guardian of freedom of thought. But of course modern science says nothing of the kind : the trouble is that it takes some fifty years for the average man to appreciate what thinkers of any kind do say, so that

we are faced by a belated materialism the arguments of which are completely out of date. All that we need say is that religion and science are, or at any rate ought to be, allies in the great adventure of the discovery of Truth.

Neither side has been blameless in the past: religious people have forgotten that all truth must, in their conception, come from God, and in its measure reveal Him; scientists have forgotten that, if their high function is to interpret fact, they must not omit from their purview facts which are inconsistent with the conclusions which they wish to draw; and spiritual facts have as good a claim to that title as any other. The simple truth is that too often religious men have spoken and acted in a most irreligious way: it is no consolation, or rather no excuse, to say that scientists have often thought and spoken most unscientifically.

But if there is a very true sense in which religion and science are allies in a common cause, it is dangerous or even disastrous to forget that their objects are profoundly different. Science asks *How?* Religion asks *Why?* and nothing but trouble can come

from forgetting this difference of purpose. It is needless for the moment to consider which is the greater quest: the point is that they are profoundly different.

And this is most easily and least controversially shown if we consider their respective attitudes towards Art. If a great picture is painted there is much which science can tell us as to the methods by which it was created and by which it makes its impression. The *medium* which the painter employs, the quality of the particular paint which he uses—these and similar technical questions are within its province. In the same way science can tell us much of the way in which the picture reaches the eye, and more of the way in which it reaches the brain—but it has to leave the matter there. *Why* the Sistine Madonna appeals unfailingly to millions, while a reproduction, very slightly different, leaves them completely cold, is an entirely different question with which science, very rightly, refuses to concern itself. The beauty of a picture is as completely outside its sphere as the heroism of the martyr.

The same is true of music. Science can

tell us much of the mechanism, and can trace in a most interesting manner the development of the instruments which provide it: it can tell us how the sounds reach the ear and, perhaps, why some type of sound makes some particular appeal. But *why* Bach means what he does to his devotees, or even why the "Marseillaise" is more inspiring than the "Internationale"—these are questions avowedly outside its scope. The B Minor Mass is to science, as such, of no more interest than the barrel-organ in the street: it can appreciate the "distinction in the sounds," as St. Paul says, but in the true sense it neither knows, nor desires to know, "what is piped or harped."

The same applies to all great literature. Science will tell you most of the conditions under which the author writes, of the origin of the words which he employs, and of the grammar which guides their use; but it has no sort of knowledge what Kipling (for instance) is driving at when he says that two passages in literature are pure magic, nor has it any desire to know. For science Wordsworth is a consistent writer and

“Coriolanus” is as good a play as “King Lear.”

This apparent digression may have served to show with how large a part of human interest and activity science is not concerned. The Kingdom of Fact and the Kingdom of Values may lie side by side, but the frontiers between the two are definite and strictly policed. It would be liable to misconception were we to say that the scientist, as such, has no concern with virtue; for his whole life is devoted to that most virtuous activity—the pursuit of truth; but before he can enter that kingdom his passport must be put in order, and it needs, as it seems to me, the authorisation of the Lord of that land. The metaphor, like most metaphors, breaks down; for, as we Christians hold, the Lord of the Kingdom of Values is the same Lord who rules also the Kingdom of Fact. Out of this dominion we cannot pass: we are all His subjects in whatever province our lot may be cast; and if two provinces ply different trades and develop different interests, both need to be recalled, as in an earthly empire with which we are more familiar, to the

loyalty which both alike owe to one Imperial Throne.

But it is time to return to our main point and to endeavour to show that, as we Christians are bound to believe, all the great activities of man have their ultimate justification in the belief in God, and lose their real meaning if that belief is cast aside.

Whereas, then, it is generally assumed that it is only religion which is concerned with the belief in God, and that, if that belief has to be abandoned, it would be the only sufferer, the arguments which we have just been considering will have shown how fallacious that assumption is: a belief in God provides the only sure foundation on which either the artist or the scientist can rely.

Every artist is bound to assume that Beauty is a real thing, and not a mere matter of personal preference. He may not concern himself with the philosophical questions involved; but the certainty with which he makes his pronouncement that this is good art and that bad implies that there is somewhere a fixed standard of beauty. It is not in the least to the point to say that artists, like ordinary mortals, have different tastes in different

generations : we may well believe that none of their judgments have absolute validity, and shall be content to think that neither they nor we ever admire any work of art for *entirely* wrong reasons. The child who is thrilled by the gaudy colours of a Christmas supplement is quite right to admire strong colour ; the Victorians who loved their heavy mahogany furniture showed a right appreciation of good material and good workmanship, though they may have put an exaggerated emphasis on those particular qualities.

The point is that all artists, and all ordinary people, firmly believe that there is such a thing as right and wrong in matters of taste : even those who have least artistic sense would agree, for example, that there is such a thing as a definitely bad smell. All who say such things are instinctively appealing to an absolute standard : all, with various degrees of violence, deny other people's rights to an opinion ; but all such judgments, and all such disputes, are clearly without meaning if " man is the measure of all things " and one man's opinion is as good as another. There can be no such

thing as an instructed opinion unless there is some real result to which instruction tends.

Our enjoyment of beauty depends on our belief that the beauty is "really there," and all our instincts reject the belief that it is merely a matter of personal and private taste. Our delight in poetry or a sunset is something which has no "survival value": it seems at any rate to raise us for a moment into a world in which the competition for survival seems unimportant—a world which we can only describe as real.

The religious explanation is a simple one: as the old Hebrews said, God made the world and saw that it was good: when we appreciate the beauty of a sunset we are, in our small way, repeating the experience of the Creator and learning to think as He eternally thinks. Spirit appears to be greeting spirit, and if that is the result of accident, it is a result so surprising as at least to make us pause and think.

But the immediate question is what justification there can be for the existence of Art and the belief in its value unless the Romantics were right in saying that Beauty is a revelation of Reality given through the



imagination: or, to put it more simply, how can there be an absolute standard of right and wrong in artistic matters unless there be an Eternal Mind in which alone such a standard can be found? The artist needs the hypothesis of a God as sorely as the man of prayer.

The ultimate dependence of Science, or the search for Truth, upon the existence behind the universe of a Directing Mind, seems to the plain man to be even more obvious. The progress of science is based on the assumption that the world makes sense, or, in other words, that there is a discoverable reason for what happens; no scientist would be content to think that his conclusions were a matter of private judgment: the mere suspicion is enough to make nonsense of all his investigations. In other words, he regards the process of nature as informed throughout by mind, and if the human mind has a non-rational origin, there can be no conceivable reason for trusting its conclusions. As Lord Balfour said many years ago: "On the naturalistic hypothesis, all our beliefs, be they wise or foolish, obvious or fantastic, true or false,

are, as regards their proximate origin, largely non-rational ; as regards their remote origin, non-rational altogether."

Can any seeker after Truth be satisfied with such a conclusion? We may, as we have seen, try to take refuge in the dream that mind has gradually evolved, but this doctrine, as we have also seen, is as repugnant to philosophy as it is to common sense. The simple fact is that the materialists, in their anxiety to destroy the foundations of theology, have, like blind Samsons, been pulling down the pillars which support the whole temple of thought.

No doubt it is conceivable that we live in a wholly irrational universe, though the conception is one almost impossible to hold with seriousness: what is inconceivable—at any rate to the ordinary man—is that Mind, as we know it, should exist except in a thinking person: and it seems to him pathetic that men of science should be ready so light-heartedly to ignore or even to attack, the principle on which the whole search for Truth would seem to depend: he ought, it seems to him, to be able to count on their co-operation in his fight for the

belief that behind the universe is Someone who at the very least knows what is going on.

For the alienation both of the artist and the man of science religious people are much to blame. As far as the artists are concerned, the Church extended to them much (very useful) patronage, but when they ceased to be content to use their talents for purely religious purposes, and found other patrons, the two drifted apart. The Church had employed them as servants not as allies, and though no doubt it is true, from the religious point of view, that the service of God is the highest form of activity, this point of view was assumed rather than explained, and the service of God was narrowed to include only obviously religious acts, such as the painting of devotional pictures or the erection and adornment of religious edifices. No one told the artist that the search for Beauty was, in its way, a seeking after God, and in the new-found liberty of the Renaissance he soon forgot his gratitude to his earlier patrons.

There was originally no conflict between Religion and Science: it is often forgotten, for example, that Augustine adumbrated

the main theory of evolution many centuries before Darwin: and it would be absurd to regard the great teachers of the Church as hostile to learning of any kind. But in spite of St. Thomas Aquinas the same mistake was made. It was left for a heretic, like Abelard, to proclaim the obvious truth that true religion cannot be unreasonable, and seekers after truth were allowed to forget the essentially religious nature of their quest. Here again the two parties drifted apart: denunciation produced counter-denunciation: and for this unfortunate state of affairs more blame must be put on the religious side. If a religious man does not know how to keep his temper in controversy, even under severe provocation, he is a poor advertisement of the doctrines which he champions.

## CHAPTER XI

### OF THE RELATION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE AND RELIGION

THE point which seems to me to need emphasising is that in the world of the present day religion is the only thing which offers a coherent solution of the problem of life. Philosophy has folded its hands in despair, and Science, while it is very far from inactive, is, very rightly from its point of view, occupied rather with particular aspects of the problem than with the problem itself. There is, for different reasons, no more a gospel of science than there is a gospel of philosophy, and it is not the fault of the best scientists if the world persists in believing that it has a gospel to preach.

No doubt it is possible that no gospel or good news is to be had, but the ultimate news about the world, if it be not good, is in a very literal sense incredibly bad. Religious people are the only ones who refuse to acquiesce in this conclusion, and deserve more sympathy than they get from the average man : whether he likes it or not, life can only be reasonably and hopefully lived on assumptions which are

ultimately religious : no one desires to shake his belief in Science, but only to question his unthinking ascription to it of an authority which its best exponents do not claim.

This line of thought may be illustrated by a short parable which represents Religion, Philosophy and Science in relationship to one another, and suggests something both of their historical affinities and of their present position.

There were once three sisters who lived together in a small town. The eldest, as was natural, had been at first allowed considerable authority : she had not always used it wisely, and at one time, as was also natural, had shown a tendency to domineer over the others, and in particular over the youngest, who was considerably the junior member of the family. Years had taught her wisdom ; but she found, to her great regret, that her earlier arrogance had lost her much of her prestige, and that her two sisters were by now by no means ready to accept her authority. They frankly regarded her as old-fashioned and, so far from thinking of her as their superior, tended to speak of her with contempt. They laughed at her prejudices, and indeed were inclined

to regard all family ties as outworn superstitions, and encouraged other people to share their poor opinion of her. This was a great pity, for she had really learnt a great deal as the years went by : she had ceased to regard herself as infallible, but felt, not without reason, that she still had much to say which was worth hearing if she could but induce her sisters to listen.

The second sister was regarded by everyone, and certainly by herself, as the intellectual member of the family. From her earliest days she had been noted for her wise remarks and for her outspoken criticism of the seniors. At one time, in spite of this, she had been on very friendly terms with her elder sister ; but there had been disagreements for which both sides were to blame, and latterly she had adopted a somewhat contemptuous attitude, and rejected all attempts at a reconciliation. She read a great deal, and was always ready to expound the results of her reading, though her sisters were not always quite certain that she understood it all. But they felt that that was probably their own fault, for she certainly *was* very clever, and they had got quite accustomed to regarding her as their intellectual

superior. The trouble was that, as time went on, she seemed to have less and less that was intelligible to say, and became more and more irritable when this was pointed out. So she played rather a small part in the family life, though her sisters were very ready to be proud of her. She had at one time been friendly, as we have said, with the younger of them, but latterly the alliance had not been so close, so that all three were tending to go their different ways.

The third sister was a good deal younger than the others : if the first was the most staid member of the family and the second the most learned, she was undoubtedly the cleverest. At one time she was regarded rather as an *enfant terrible*, and used to be snubbed by both of them when she propounded her theories : the eldest sister in particular had been very harsh with her, and she had resented it bitterly—in fact the memory of those early days still rankled, and she was ready, on occasion, to retaliate. But her undoubted cleverness had won its way, and latterly both had conceded her a privileged position. They both admired her, but with a certain timidity, and whereas they had once tried to



keep her in her place, they were becoming uneasily conscious that she was not only the most brilliant but the most popular member of the family, and tried to keep in her good books—for she had rather a nasty tongue and would make things unpleasant for those whom she disliked. Unfortunately all this success had been rather bad for her character : at one time she became extremely unbearable, and would allow no one's voice to be heard except her own. She had almost outgrown this youthful weakness, and was more ready than she had been to let her sisters speak, but the trouble was that her elder sister had somewhat lost her nerve : being a good soul, she was very conscious that she had failed in her duty in the past and was unduly diffident at expressing her opinion now, while the learned sister, it must unhappily be confessed, had really very little to say, and was afraid of losing her reputation for wisdom if she opened her mouth. So at the time when our story begins the family was in a rather unhappy condition ; the youngest sister, in her best moods, was anxious for a reconciliation with the eldest ; the eldest, on her part, was equally anxious to come to terms with her, but was

dreadfully afraid that it might involve abandoning some of her principles, and was nothing if not high-principled ; while the second sister, uneasily conscious that she was not counting for very much in the family life, tended more and more to withdraw into herself ; she read more and more learned books, but the more she read the less capable she seemed of writing anything herself, and her sisters were beginning to fear that all her great promise would come to nothing.

The outside world had no doubt which of the sisters it preferred : the youngest was a universal favourite, and the loose talking in which she sometimes indulged was readily forgiven to one so brilliant and so practical. The second sister was generally regarded as something of a freak : no one disputed her learning, but it was generally felt that it was of little practical value. The eldest was liked in a mild way, except by some young people who thought her something of a killjoy ; but no one gave her much credit for intelligence, and it was generally felt that the time would soon come when she would hand over the management of affairs to the capable hands of

her clever young sister, and that the change would be all to the good.

There had, as I have said, been a time when the young lady would have jumped at the chance. In her young days she had felt herself fit for anything, and bitterly resented the tutelage of her elders ; but latterly she had become somewhat more diffident. It was not that she had any doubt of her own ability—it would have been absurd to doubt that : the practical changes she had introduced, sometimes in the face of considerable opposition, had all, or almost all, proved their value, and she had no doubt that she would have many other equally good ideas. But she rather shrank from the thought of undertaking the whole management of the family : it involved many problems which were outside her sphere and did not interest her, so that on the whole she preferred the freedom of her present position, where she was at entire liberty to criticise or to make suggestions, but avoided any ultimate responsibility.

So the eldest sister had to carry on. She was quite conscious of her own limitations, and would much have valued the help of her juniors ; but if she knocked at the study door

she generally failed to get an answer, and if she went round to the laboratory where the youngest sister spent most of her time she was generally told that she was too busy to think of anything except her latest experiment. So she went back to her duties with a sigh. "After all," she said to herself, "someone must carry on the household, and neither of the others seems ready to help. Of course they are much cleverer than I am ; but, after all, this *is* a home, and not only a workshop or a study. That's what neither of them seems to realise. I know I've made a lot of mistakes, but that's the only way to learn." So it was with a sigh that she turned to organising the daily life of the household. The cook had not the best of tempers : the parlour-maid was not very strong, and one of the housemaids had just been crossed in love, so her task was not easy. She wished her sisters took more interest, but the one was too remote and the other was frankly not much interested in people. She sighed again : but, after all, the business of life had to be carried on—or was that just another of her mistakes ?

## CHAPTER XII

### OF THE NEED FOR A " RELIGIOUS OFFENSIVE "

THE little parable which has just been given ends on a note of some hesitation : is religion really right in maintaining that life is important and that thought must have some reasonable background ? There would seem to be no doubt of the answer, and if so, we ought to be more courageous in maintaining our cause. We ought to say to the world, " We offer you an explanation which gives a meaning to your life : it is not an easy explanation, but there is no sort of reason for expecting an easy answer to so vast a problem. It is a coherent explanation, though not a complete one : it can be submitted to the most practical of tests. We say that, if it is honestly acted on, it will produce results which everyone will admit to be good, and that is the only test which we are capable of applying. If you reject it, what is your alternative ? Are you really too content to live your life with no explanation, or to act on principles which have no plausible foundation ? In that case, however much we may admire your character, we have a very poor opinion of your understanding.

"We are not in the least content to exist on sufferance as if we were clinging to our old superstitions in defiance of reason : we challenge you either to produce your alternative and to submit it to our criticism, or to confess that you are intellectually bankrupt."

It will be seen that I feel that Christians should definitely undertake the offensive : in the past they have often been offensive to their opponents in the bad sense of the term : they have sneered at their arguments and aspersed their characters. It may be hoped that those days are over ; but it is high time that they challenged the world either to produce an alternative which can be understood and accepted, or to confess that they have no idea what is the meaning and the purpose of human life.

I cannot imagine why so many religious people are content to take up a purely defensive attitude, as if they were holding an ancient and venerable fortress, and consciously, though courageously, defending a position which is rapidly becoming untenable. There may be some reason why that should be the point of view of our opponents, but none whatever for our adopting it ourselves.

Christianity is not in the least like a fortress, nor can there be any more ridiculous travesty of Christ's teaching than to suggest that he hedged his disciples round with walls of doctrine which were liable to crumble before the assaults of time.

He preached the central truth—the love and Fatherhood of God, with its corollary the Brotherhood of Man. It was never an easy doctrine to accept, for sin and suffering are not discoveries of the twentieth century : it was a pious exaggeration which caused the Psalmist to assert that the seed of the righteous never begged their bread ; and the Jews before his time had begun to see that if the righteous God in Whom they believed had any existence at all, His operations could not be limited to this world. Christ confirmed and amplified their belief : the Father of Whom he spoke is God not only of the living, but of the dead ; He accepts the responsibility for the fall of the sparrow.

It is silly to suppose that those to whom he spoke found this an easy belief : the average human brain has not developed appreciably in two thousand years, and it was not necessary to be an acute Athenian to see that the

new teaching was strange and that its preacher was quite possibly a "babbler."

That possibility remains to-day ; but Christianity also remains as a challenge to the world—a doctrine which professes to give a reasonable account of man's existence, and a possible explanation of his strivings after what is good and beautiful and true, a justification of all his intellectual and spiritual activities.

The need for such an explanation remains, except for those who deny that any justification is possible, and hold that all which we value in morality, art or science, is the unaided creation of the human spirit and lacks any background in the world of reality. To offer an explanation and to be prepared to have it tested is a sounder position than to deny the possibility and to abandon the quest ; or, if that be an over-statement, let us reverse it, and say that those who deny the ultimate validity of all the achievements of the human spirit have no obvious reason for despising those who believe that they live in a rational and moral universe.

We have a right to ask our critics what is the alternative which they suggest, and, if the agnosticism which they profess is as blank



as it sometimes appears to be, to rate their criticism accordingly. Aristotle is recorded to have said that a man who would not grant that black was not the same as white was a "cabbage" and incapable of being argued with. Politeness, or Christian charity, may forbid us to imitate his language; but we may surely ask by what right a man believes in Beauty, Goodness or Truth, if there be no power behind the world capable of appreciating their existence. And if Truth has to follow morality into the everlasting bonfire, what is the use of arguing at all?

It may seem that I am being "offensive" to my opponents in the more ordinary sense of the word: I have no intention of being so. I am prepared to admit that religious people in general, and Christians in particular, have given enormous provocation in the past, and have shown slight respect for those who disagreed with them. I feel that unbelief is, or rather may be, entirely "respectable," and am quite conscious that many much abler men than I think my beliefs absurd. I only ask in return that a similar respect should be paid to those who hold the Christian faith: that they should not be held responsible for errors

of thought which they have long repudiated, and for actions which they abhor ; that some attempt should be made to consider Christianity not only as a guide to good conduct, but as a serious and reasonable attempt to grapple with the problems of the world's existence, not only as a religion, but as a faith.

It cannot be altogether without justification that so profound a thinker as Dr. Whitehead declares that the Western Church made possible the triumphs of modern science by its superb and unshaken confidence in the ultimate rationality of the universe. The Church retains that faith to-day : it has a right to ask whether it is shared by its critics, and, if so, on what ground they share it.

## CHAPTER XIII

### OF THE MORAL ARGUMENT FOR BELIEF IN GOD

WE have so far been dealing only with the intellectual arguments for our belief, and have been trying to show that, so far from being an "unreasonable" conviction, belief in God affords the only sound foundation for reasonable thinking and for all the intellectual activities of mankind. This is a very necessary argument; for we are bidden to be able to give a *reason* for the faith that is in us, and, if we cannot do so, our faith is at the mercy of what St. Paul prophetically describes as "oppositions of science falsely so called."

But some readers may well have been wondering when we proposed to deal with that moral argument which rightly and naturally seems to them the most convincing one. Put in its simplest form, it asks whether there is anything in evolution which can explain man's persistent desire to be not happier or stronger, but *better* than he is—and better as judged by a standard which he did not create, and which

indeed runs counter to many of his strong instincts.

We are all of us selfish people: is it conceivable that, being what we are, we should create for ourselves the belief that selfishness is a detestable thing? It clearly has great survival value, but that fact has been quite unable to win for it any credit in any theoretical estimate of human qualities.

Why, we must ask, is our theory so marvellously different from our practice? Why is it that, at the moment when we are living selfish lives, we are constitutionally incapable of admiring selfishness, even when that selfishness is our own? Is there any example in history of selfishness, pure and simple, winning disinterested applause? Even if we sometimes allow ourselves to regard the mild virtues of Dr. Jekyll with a patronising contempt, there is no one, outside an asylum, who holds any brief for the atrocities of Mr. Hyde. The lower you put your estimate of the character of man, the more amazing you will find his persistent refusal to acquiesce in a doctrine which lowers him to the level of the brutes that perish.

If the doctrine of evolution can be trusted,

man has risen to his eminence by the selfish virtues which seem to dominate the struggle for existence : as soon as he has done so, as soon as he has really become man, he is seen without hesitation to kick down the ladder on which he has mounted, and to rank himself on the side of the angels. Disraeli's famous sneer, however foolish as against those whom he used it to attack, yet has in it a real element of truth. Man *is* on the angels' side, and beside the definitions which describe him as a tool-using animal, or an animal which has developed the use of speech or fire, it is not absurd to describe him as an unselfish animal.

This is not to deny that traces of the same quality may be found in the inferior creation—why should we desire such a denial?—but the conscious belief in unselfishness we may fairly claim as the prerogative of man alone.

Where did he learn this lesson? The answer which a religious man would give is that it is a spark of the divine fire, burning often very dimly, but sometimes glowing with an unearthly radiance, and bearing clear witness to the power of a Creator who

has allowed man, the crown of His creation, to share in the inmost mystery of His own nature.

Simple Christians will put the argument in a simpler form: they will say that they know, or think they know, that Christ is the Lord of all good life, and feel that his declaration of the will of God as to how a man should live is in itself sufficient evidence both of his divinity and of their duty.

It is certainly true that the perfection of Christ's character must always remain the strongest argument for religion in the mind of the ordinary man. We know that in India the name of Christ commands respect even from those who do not call themselves Christians, and that so long as the missionary is speaking of him he will be listened to with attention. The strongest argument which can be used against our faith is that we have in fact failed to practise it, and that fact, as we have already seen, is no argument against its truth.

But for the moment we are considering, so to speak, the moral argument from the intellectual side: we want to make it clear that there is such a thing as moral progress

in the world, and that that progress implies a goal at which we are aiming—a thing impossible to conceive unless there is some Moral Being who has a right to set the standard—in other words, a God. Again, we must maintain that the progress which we can trace is all in the direction of the morality which Christ preached, and that this is a clear proof of his divinity.

He did not lay down rules, like Mohammed, but principles, and the experience of two thousand years has cast no doubt on any of the principles which he propounded. That a teacher so infallible should arise in an ordinary home in a small Jewish town, in a community at least as narrow-minded as is to be found in a small English town to-day, is in itself a fact so amazing that, even were there no other evidence to support it, the claim made on his behalf would demand the most careful consideration.

But it will be asked, By what right do we claim any certainty for our knowledge of right and wrong? Have not the clearest mistakes been made even by religious men? And what of the gross blunders of earlier

ages? How can we rely on a moral sense which is liable to such eccentricities?

These are some of the problems with which this section of our argument will deal: even if it should in any part fail to carry conviction, we are left with the problem of man's certainty that Right and Wrong are real things, and shall be entitled to our belief that this points inevitably to his kinship with a God who cares supremely for Goodness and is the ultimate Judge as to what Goodness is.

We have seen that our discussion so far has taken no account of that argument which is generally supposed to be the chief, if not the only, support of a belief in God—the argument derived from the moral sense of mankind. It is certain that for any one person who is drawn to that belief for abstract intellectual reasons such as those which we have been discussing, thousands embrace it because it seems to them to afford the only sure basis for morality. It is hardly too much to say that moral considerations are what caused the vast majority of people to embrace the belief at first, to retain it, if they do retain it,



and to abandon it if abandoned it has to be.

If there is anything in our contention that Beauty cannot be held to have any sure claim to existence or any objective value unless there be a God Who shall be the Judge of what is truly beautiful, or Truth unless there be a God Who knows what is really true, it is obvious that the distinction between right and wrong, if indeed it have any absolute authority and be not an arbitrary fiction of the human mind, must be one existent ultimately in the thought, or, if we may so speak, in the conscience of God.

Nor shall we be satisfied with a God who merely knows the difference between good and evil: it is plain that any being who, knowing the difference, preserved a strict impartiality between them, could be no object of rational worship. In other words, God, for the worshipper, if not for the pure thinker, must be not only Wise, but Good. No other conclusion can give any sort of satisfaction to the demands of man: if perfect goodness be not found in God, "our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins,"

or rather faith and sin have both lost all their meaning.

It is worth while to insist upon this obvious point, for religious people did, and do, so often attribute actions and intentions to God which are absolutely inconsistent with what we know of goodness, that the plain man is apt to forget what is really the most central of all truths. "Let God be true and every man a liar," said St. Paul; in the same spirit we may say that the goodness of God remains unshakeable whatever atrocities may be committed in His name.

It will at once be asked what right we have to regard our judgments of right and wrong as so stable that we can be sure what is meant by goodness. The answer is that we can only be true to the light which is in us. A conscientious act may be mistaken, if we are wrongly informed as to the facts; but the honest following of conscience can never be an offence in the sight of a good God. Such an act calls for the same allowance which would be made by any good man called upon to judge his fellows.

That God, for instance, would condemn unbaptised infants to eternal punishment

for no other fault than that of lacking baptism was long a tenet of many Christians. It is a doctrine so obviously untenable to the instructed conscience that our problem is rather to consider how God will judge those who attributed to Him so monstrous an injustice. He will make, we may not doubt, such allowance as they deserve. If we are faced with the alternative that they may have been right and we wrong, we can only say with the nineteenth-century agnostic: If such a God condemns me to Hell for refusing to credit Him with such iniquity, to Hell I will go.

It is very easy to make too much of that "diversity of moral judgment" which has caused so many people to disparage the guidance which conscience gives. Just as in the case of art it is perfectly possible for an honest judgment to be mistaken, so in the case of morality the uninstructed conscience will give an answer vastly different from that which it will give when better informed. There is nothing in this which need either surprise or distress: it would indeed be miraculous if a child were able to settle problems with the security of the grown man.

What we should maintain is that, though the moral sense may admire the worse of two alternative qualities, it will never admire that which is bad in itself. Just as the child is not *wrong* to admire the bright colours which later taste will value less highly, so the savage is not *wrong* to admire courage and strength, though he may fail to see the value of qualities which are nobler still. We are not ashamed of the crudities of our early taste, or, if we are, we are not ashamed of them for artistic reasons. To admire something merely because of other people's opinion is a thing to be ashamed of, and we may feel shame because of our ignorance or laziness; but if the artistic opinion was originally an honest one we shall not blush for it, even when it is outgrown. Indeed, we shall continue to admire what we admired before, though not so greatly nor so exclusively as at first.

The same is true of the growth of moral perception. The virtues and the vices will change their relative positions, but as we have never admired for itself anything which is (wholly) bad, we shall not have to unlearn

anything, great though our need of more learning may be.

It is a commonplace to say that we are relapsing into an age of brute force, but it is a commonplace which has very little truth in it. No sane historian can doubt that the last hundred years have seen throughout the world an amazingly greater appreciation of those virtues which we regard as peculiarly moral: the mere fact that the world is shocked, as it has never been before, at the contrast between our principles and our practice, is a very striking proof of moral progress. Those who, quite rightly, complain of the impotence of the League of Nations would do well to contrast its objects with those of the Congress of Vienna: that the representatives of more than fifty nations should condemn a breach of international morality, with the approval of their respective countries, is a fact of outstanding importance for the moralist, and it is not vitiated by the deplorable fact that most of them have been very unwilling to act in support of their convictions.

To deny that the world has a stronger conviction than ever before, that force ought

not to be the only argument, that the weak have a special claim on the consideration of the strong, and that wealth and power should not be used for personal and material purposes—to deny this seems to me to argue an ignorance of history, only excusable because of the high ideals of those who profess it.

Nor can it be wrong for a Christian to point out that this moral progress, halting and inadequate as it clearly is, is all in the direction of those virtues which the Founder of Christianity set in the forefront of his teaching. In essentials the world is far more Christian-minded to-day, even when it rejects Christianity, than in the days when the Church claimed, not without reason, to be the dominant power in Europe.

But for our present purpose the important point is to register our belief that there is such a thing as discernible moral progress among mankind: to ask whether the term "progress" can be used by those who deny that there is a goal to which it tends; and to maintain that it is most improbable that such a goal, usually defined as the attainment of complete unselfishness, could have

originated in the mind of selfish man, or is likely to be pursued by him with such pathetic earnestness in defiance of all his obvious interests.

No one denies that great moral heights have been scaled by those who doubted or denied the existence of God: there is nothing in that to surprise or to daunt the theist. He only suggests that the solution which he offers of a God Who is Himself good and the Author and standard of goodness supplies an object for their search and a reason for their labours which no other solution can satisfactorily supply.

The Bolshevist, who, denying God, enforces incredible sacrifices on himself and his own generation to secure the happiness of children yet unborn, can neither explain in what that happiness is to consist nor why he should feel the moral necessity to secure it. The Christian could tell him that in sacrificing himself for others he is obeying God's primary law, and that the happiness which he seeks to provide will be of little avail if it is a merely physical comfort, oblivious of the moral forces which alone called it into being. If I am prepared to

starve myself to give my children bread, it must be because I know that man does not, and cannot, live by bread alone, or rather that the life so preserved is not a thing of ultimate value.



## CHAPTER XIV

### OF THE ARGUMENT THAT THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL DISPROVES THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

It is at first sight a curious fact that that same moral sense which, as we have just seen, provides the most obvious argument for belief in God, is also the most common cause of the doubts which so many people feel of His existence. If God is good, how can He acquiesce in the existence of evil? Does not the condition of the world to-day inevitably suggest that there is no Controlling Power which will ensure the triumph of the good cause?

No judicious reader will expect to find, in a little book like this, a learned philosophical discussion of the existence of evil. All that will be attempted is to make some suggestions which have a definite bearing on the point and are too frequently forgotten by those who take part in the dispute. That there is such a thing as the Mystery of Evil the writer would not attempt to deny. But he would most emphatically assert that there is also such a thing as the Mystery of Goodness, and that, mystery for mystery, this is the more mysterious of the two; so far as our own lives are con-

cerned. I can understand why, with my animal ancestry (which includes, as Bishop Creighton used to remind us, not only the ape and tiger, but the donkey), I revert continually to what I know to be wrong : what I cannot understand is why, being the selfish creature that I am, I am quite unable to applaud my own selfish mistakes, and have continually in my mind the belief, if not the certainty, that I was made for something better. It is a pity that the one mystery receives so much more attention than the other.

It has always seemed to me curious that, whereas the phrase Original Sin is often on the lips of controversialists, nothing is ever said about Original Goodness. And yet, so far as our minds can go, it would appear that there can be no guilt unless there be a knowledge of what goodness is and a sense that it is possible to reach it.

In the same way it may be argued that goodness, as we know it, involves the ability to resist sin, which in turn involves the possibility of committing it.

If the philosopher asks us in what sense this is true of God, we should have to confess our ignorance ; but this would not prevent

us from affirming that, in the human world which we know, the two possibilities must exist side by side. Man is born with the capacity for sin, differing thereby from any other animal, so far as our knowledge extends ; but he is also (with the same limitation) the only animal for whom goodness in the true sense is possible. It is a great pity that we have spent so much time in argument about the former fact without appreciating the significance of the latter.

Let us begin by remembering that our very dissatisfaction with the world as it is argues a standard of goodness which man is incapable of having set up for himself : that a very large part of the miseries of the world is directly traceable to man's misuse of freewill, and that the gift of freewill involved the possibility of some such result. The fact that religion in general, and the Christian religion in particular, has done so little to cure the miseries of the world, though extremely depressing in itself and the inevitable cause of disbelief, has no logical bearing on the question. A patient who habitually refused to take the medicine prescribed to him, in the quantity or with the regularity desired by his physician,

would have no sort of grievance either against the doctor or the drug if his illness persisted. It is the belief of all religious people that if they themselves and the world at large made more attempts to conform to the will of God the results would soon be manifest : it is the particular belief of Christian people that, if individuals and nations who profess to accept Christ's teaching would act as if it were true, the one cure for the moral troubles of the world would be triumphantly vindicated. They maintain that history shows this to be true, and refuse to regard their own failures as proving anything more than their own demonstrable disloyalty.

Something more must be said of the argument for free will, which is mentioned in the preceding paragraph. We need not attempt to argue that the human will is free, for those who deny it must logically maintain that we who hold that belief do so from an inescapable necessity and that they who disbelieve it are not free to pay attention to our arguments. But we may reasonably ask the question whether it is conceivable that any intelligent God would create a world of human beings who were destined to act mechanically. No

doubt it is not a final answer to say that *we* cannot conceive of a possibility : but if the test which we have to apply is the test of purpose, we may reasonably ask what possible purpose such a creation would serve ; and a God without a purpose is a contradiction in terms.

If, then, we argue that God “ must ” leave man free, we see at once that it is absurd to expect Him to interfere as soon as any wrong choice is made. We do not expect, or really wish, God to *stop* us from doing something wrong ; for we know, or think we know, that we are in this world to develop our characters, and the fact that our error is going to have bad results is precisely the way in which we are being taught to do better.

But if that is true of our individual lives, it is nothing but a form of snobbery to suppose that what is true of us private citizens is not equally true of men in great positions. The ambition or treachery of a statesman may cause a disastrous war, whereas our petty falsehoods and meannesses only bring distress to those closely connected with us ; but is there any difference in principle, or any possible line which can be drawn ?

It is only when we realise how much of the misery of the world comes from the simple fact that men refuse to do God's will, that we shall have any real motive either for doing it ourselves or for using whatever influence we may have to induce others to do it. We can see that our social troubles to-day come from the criminal folly of those who made haste to be rich a century ago : the point is that their mistakes were not economic but moral : they knew as well as we do what was their duty to their neighbour, and they did not do it, for reasons which are lamentably plain. We have learnt, or rather are slowly learning, our lesson ; but the teacher is not to be blamed because his pupils are free not to attend to what he teaches them. A people like the English, which prides itself on freedom, should be the last to complain of the dispensation which leaves it free, however disastrous its misuse of its liberty may be. God deals with us precisely as we believe that a wise schoolmaster should deal with those in his charge.

It would be ridiculous to try to estimate what proportion of the miseries of the world either is due to past misuse of human freedom

or would disappear were that freedom to be rightly used ; but no thinking person can deny that it would be a very large one. There is a famous passage in which Hume depicts the evils he saw : “ were a stranger to drop suddenly into this world, I would show him as a specimen of its ills, a hospital full of diseases, a prison crowded with malefactors and debtors, a field of battle strewn with carcasses, a nation languishing under tyranny, famine or pestilence.” It will be observed that in this gloomy list the great majority of miseries enumerated are directly due to man’s own fault, and could be banished were he with determination to will their banishment.

Some would undoubtedly remain ; man is not directly responsible for disease, famine or pestilence, though it may well be that his improvidence has something to do with them. But even to this gloomy picture there is another side :

Could Hume show his hospital without any indication of the skill of the physician, the sympathy which has set it up, and the patience and kindness which enable its work to be carried on ? Would not even the prison awaken in his mind thoughts of the law of which it is the instrument, of the society which the law protects, and

of the moral judgments which lie behind the law? Would there be no reference to justice and the defence of the weak against the strong? Would the battlefield itself be entirely devoid of instances of value? Would not the stronger find courage and devotion there, as well as evil passions, folly and death? In short, the picture is painted by putting in all the shadows and leaving out all the high lights which the shadows bring into relief.<sup>1</sup>

It would be too much to argue that without shadows there could be no true light, but it is certainly true that in a world in which there was no pain many of the qualities which we most value would, so far as we can see, cease to exist. It cannot be altogether a false instinct which leads us to value more highly the sports which involve some risk or some "painful" exertion: nor should it be entirely forgotten that much pain, as we know it, is a danger signal without which our lives would be possibly sweeter, but certainly much shorter, than they are.

Suggestions such as these, though they do not touch the central problem of evil, may do something to prevent us from hastily assuming that its existence is incompatible with that of a good God. It may be that in the ultimate

<sup>1</sup> Matthews, *The Purpose of God*, p. 80.



sense of the word evil is not as " real " as good : it is certainly interesting that St. John in a famous passage pointedly uses a different Greek word for " doing " good and " doing " evil. The former implies real creation : it is the word which gives its name to the poet, who was called pre-eminently the " Maker " because the Greeks thought poetry the thing supremely worth making ; the latter implies no creative act, so that it may be held that the evil-doer brings nothing real into existence, but is only missing his opportunities of doing good.

It is also worth notice that St. Paul contrasts the " fruits " of light and righteousness with the " works " of darkness : the one is the natural result of man's following his true nature, the other is something artificial ; again, light is a positive thing, while darkness is purely negative ; nor should it be forgotten that, though a match will banish darkness wherever it goes, no amount of mere darkness can prevail to extinguish a match.

These ideas may be fanciful, though that does not mean that they are unworthy of consideration ; for a Christian the important point is that, while Christ never discussed the origin

of evil, he did show how it could be overcome. Throughout his life, he was bringing good out of evil, and his death on the cross was but the inevitable and dramatic evidence of what his life had shown. The Christian religion does not evade the problem of evil, but bids us grapple with it, in the assurance that it cannot ultimately harm the man of goodwill any more than in its most concentrated form it was able to harm his Master. "It was not possible," said St. Peter, "that Christ should be holden of the pangs of death": nor is it possible, in a God-ruled universe, that any triumph of evil should be permanent or final.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE ALTERNATIVES BEFORE US

WE have now arrived at the end of our attempt to establish, from an intellectual point of view, the "reasonability" of a belief in God: before we come to the question how that belief can be practically tested, it will be well to sum up the main argument which we have been trying to develop. I will do so in words which are not my own.

The plain fact is that science has landed us back into the face of the mysteries, and unless we accept the explanation offered by a belief in God and a belief in man, they are mysteries which confound. Accept belief in God, and belief in man becomes possible. Accept belief in man, and the universe becomes the expressive word of a Creator. Reject either, and man becomes an insignificant detail, tortured by the sense of his own futility. Hold to both, and you are roused to a sense of greatness which must drive you to key up life to an ever-increasing pitch of effectiveness. Hold to both, and you become conscious of a Mind in all things to which we are akin, with whom we can hold friendship, and towards whom we can tend. Hold to both, and the Universe is a home; reject either, and it is a furious alternation of terrific heat and appalling cold, on which we gaze with terror, while we cling desperately to a chance-cooled cinder from which we can scarce wring

our sustenance for the brief hours in which we can exist.

This passage is taken from a book called *The Meeting of the Roads* written by one who is both a theologian and a scientist : some sentences in it may recall another passage written by Robert Louis Stevenson in which he describes how "our rotatory island, loaded with predatory life, and more drenched with blood, both animal and vegetable, than ever mutinied ship, sends through space with unimaginable speed, and turns alternate cheeks to the reverberation of a blazing world, ninety million miles away."

Are we to acquiesce in that description as all that we can say ? Stevenson, of course, did not : in a later passage of the same essay he describes how the "desire of well doing" runs through all the grades of life, and though he sees the desire continually frustrated and effort constantly unrewarded, he ends with the words, "Let it be enough for faith, that the whole creation groans in mortal frailty, strives with unconquerable constancy : Surely not all in vain."

There are the alternatives before us ; it is

well to face them honestly. It may be that our life has no meaning, and that there is no good to which we are bidden to strive ; but before we accept so devastating a conclusion it is surely worth while to explore the path which has been trodden, not without success, by many who have gone before us. The lives of the saints are real, even if their motives were mistaken and their hopes illusory, and it is surely better even to stumble a few steps along the road which they took than to fold our hands in impotent despair.

## CHAPTER XVI

### OF THE EVIDENCE OF THOSE WHO CLAIM THAT THEY HAVE HEARD GOD'S VOICE

NOTHING has so far been said of the evidence for God's existence afforded by those who claimed in the past, and claim to-day, to have heard His voice. It is always possible to dismiss such evidence as a form of hallucination, and it is impossible to prove its value, but it constitutes a fact which every student of facts is bound to consider.

When those who make the claim are contemporaries of our own, we shall be disposed to ask whether the nature of the message which they receive is such as to dispose us to consider the claim seriously : it may be said in passing that the strongest argument against the reality of the messages received from what is called " the Spirit World " is that they convey so little that is either of interest or of value. We are bound to give weight to the evidence of men whom we respect when they assure us that they are confident of God's presence and that they hear what they believe to be His voice, and we shall not be unduly prejudiced by remembering that many similar

claims have been made by very inferior people. No amount of bad poetry disposes us to question the inspiration of a true poet, and the records of the saints and mystics is something which no unprejudiced mind will lightly disregard.

But the most impressive testimony of all is that borne by the Jewish race as a whole : their belief in God founded on, or at least reinforced by, the long succession of men who claimed to have heard God speaking to them, and handed on the message. When that message is judged, as it ought to be, by the quality of its content, we find that the prophets continually taught a morality far in advance of that around them, and steadily led the people on to a higher conception of God's nature.

It is interesting to compare the way in which the Jews came to a knowledge of God with that followed by the Greeks. The Greeks sat down, so to speak, and thought the matter out : as they came to think more and more about nature—for they were the first natural scientists—they found existing there the law of causation, and so came to abandon their belief in the many Gods who

had hitherto been held responsible for each particular event. They came to see the universe as a single whole, and observation and reflection led them to the belief in one God Who controlled all. Monotheism was a discovery of the philosophers.

What happened in Palestine was something totally different. The Hebrew prophets were not thinkers or philosophers : they are admirably typified by Amos, the first of them whose writings we possess, and his account of his call is simplicity itself : “ I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son, but I was an herdman, and a dresser of sycomore figs, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.”

He heard, or at least thought that he heard, the authentic voice of God, and it was a voice whose command it was impossible to refuse : “ The lion hath roared, who will not fear ? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy ? ”

The same feeling of a divine compulsion is present with all the greatest of the prophets : hallucination, or self-hypnotism, is no doubt a possible explanation ; but it is one which should be given with caution when what we



love to explain is the whole religious history of a nation, and it must in fairness be remembered that the sanity and good practical sense of the Jewish prophets do not in the least suggest the ecstatic and imaginative temperament of the mere visionary.

Bishop Gore, in his *Belief in God*, sums up the argument in words which leave little to be said :

Here, then, we find a succession of wonderful men, mostly conscious of profound unpopularity in their contemporary world, who nevertheless, even in the face of the most determined hostility of courts and people, delivered a message which we feel to be self-consistent and to involve the same great principles throughout, about God—His nature, His will, His purposes—and about human nature—its dignity, its responsibility, and its sin ; a message which they declare, with the fullest conviction, to be derived not from their own reasoning or speculation, nor from tradition (though they would have indignantly repudiated the idea that they were its first recipients), nor from any external source at all, but from God, the God of Israel, speaking in their own souls, so intensely and clearly that there could be no mistake about it.

and this is how he deals with the suggestions that what they took for a divine message was really one from what is called in modern jargon their “ unconscious mind ” :

Whence did the unconscious mind get this astonishing series of messages? It does not lie within the compass of the materials out of which, as far as we can judge, it is and must be formed. In other words, it seems infinitely more probable that it was "a downrush from the super-conscious"—the voice of the Spirit of God, as the prophets themselves so imperiously insist.<sup>1</sup>

Not everyone will be prepared to accept so uncompromising a verdict, but every sincere student of evidence is bound to take account of so remarkable a phenomenon, and, the more he studies the great Hebrew prophets and compares their teaching both with the ideas of the people to whom they spoke, and with the contemporary ideas of other races, the longer will he pause before he dismisses as negligible this evidence that the same God who spoke to us in His Son "spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets."

When we turn from the prophets to the mystics we find the same unquestioning confidence in the nearness of God and in the reality of communication with Him. Those who themselves have not these powers will find the "jargon" of mysticism sometimes repellent, but, if they are honest, they will

<sup>1</sup> Gore's *Belief in God*, pp. 78 and 106.

not be disposed to question the good faith of those who report what they have seen and heard.

Sometimes these visions seem to the outside world extravagant, but our English mystical saints, who can be seen in Dean Inge's *Studies of English Mystics*, are, as he says, "very sane and sensible. Whether recluses, or philosophers, they might have defied even a mad doctor to do his worst."

A definition of mysticism which he quotes is worth remembering: "Mysticism is that attitude of mind which divines and moves toward the spiritual in the common things of life," and so are Emerson's words which speak of "an influx of the Divine mind into our mind." Of course, if "the spiritual" be a mere illusion, and if there be no "Divine mind" which can communicate with ours, we shall have to consider the mystics as self-deceivers, but that is a serious charge to bring against a very distinguished company. We prefer to think of them as men and women who have a keener insight than ourselves into reality, and can realise the divine where we see only the commonplace. That, after all, is the poetic gift, and, though prosaic people have

called poets mad, the world has agreed not to disregard their testimony.

The old Greeks had a legend that the man who saw Pan lost his reason, because Pan means everything, and that is too much for any mortal brain to comprehend. We remember that on the day of Pentecost those who had received the gift of the Holy Spirit seemed to the bystanders to be mad or drunken, and that might well be the impression created if a lot of ordinary people suddenly realised the true meaning of life.

It is glimpses of that insight which are granted to the mystics, and their evidence must be regarded as confirming what the prophets had said, that God does make His will known in divers portions and in divers ways. Our illustrations will naturally come from Christian mystics, but it must not be forgotten from the point of view of our present argument that there are and have been many non-Christian mystics whose testimony to God's voice must be regarded as equally valid.

Our English Christian mystics—to limit ourselves to them—include anchorites, soldiers, clergymen and college tutors, all of them inspired by a love of God which, if it

was based on an illusion, at any rate has a beauty all its own and leads to a life which no one can regard as other than good. It is the mystic vision of God which leads the anchoress Julian of Norwich to her belief that " it is the most worship to Him of anything that we may do, that we live gladly and merrily, for His love." It is the mystic vision which makes a fourteenth-century mystic sure that it is only our blindness which leads us to doubt the continual presence of God : " We are asleep, He is awake. We are abroad, He is at home, He is always ready ; it is we who are unready " ; and the same vision which causes William Law to exclaim : " For once, turn your eyes to heaven, and dare but own a just and good God, and then you have owned to the origin of religion and moral virtue."

Anyone who will read Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* will see, as clearly as in any book that I know, how the acknowledgment of God must, if we are consistent, give a unity and purpose to our lives which we can gain from no other source.

As for the poets, it is difficult to over-

estimate the evidence which they bring for the reality of what is called "inspiration": they feel themselves to be filled with a power not their own, and to discount all their testimony comes very near to stultifying all human intelligence. Wordsworth is the typical example of a poet constantly conscious of the greatness of his calling: listen to his assertion of its greatness and of its dependence upon a divine source: "To be incapable of a feeling of poetry, in my sense of the word, is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God." Or recall his famous testimony to

A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a scene sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

Wordsworth had no doubt that he was conscious of this presence, and his poetry exists to prove it. Browning, a very different poet, has an equally mystical faith in the love which he regards as the ultimate law of the universe.

The reason for his passionate faith in man is his capacity for Love—the “ spark God gave us from His fire of fires ”—so that his final message is

So let us say—not, since we know, we love,  
But rather, since we love, we know enough.

It is clear that all his thought depends on the unprovable existence behind the world of a loving God.

We have spoken of the evidence of the prophets and of the mystics : when we turn to the evidence of the saints we find an overwhelming consensus of opinion that it is through their faith in God that they have been able to achieve their work. We might borrow the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews and repeat, “ What shall we more say ? for the time would fail us to tell ” of all those servants of God who have served Him in their several generations. The circumstances of their lives have differed incalculably : they have been men of war and men of peace : rich and poor : powerful and weak : the particular objects which they have set before them have been infinitely various, but one and all they

have been inspired by a vivid sense of the nearness of God, and upheld by a consciousness that they were fulfilling His will.

By their fruits they are known, and it is by the lives of the saints that religion has the right to claim that it should be tested : what other theory of life can show any comparable results ? and what other test can be propounded than that of the tendency of any theory to produce lives which the whole world regards as good ? Nor, when we are speaking of saints, must we forget those whose names find a place in no Calendar, and who are not members of our faith : it is the simple fact that a belief in God and in God's purpose for mankind has proved able to elicit what is best in human nature. The testimony of those who claim to have heard God's voice is overwhelming in its magnitude : they have not always heard it clearly, and would tell us that they have never obeyed it perfectly : but in every century and in every country men have heard a call to follow the highest with no thought of profit or of advantage. There is nothing in mere human nature, as we know it, to explain such a disregard of all to which



mere human nature clings : we must either explain it away, which, considering all we owe to it, is a very thankless task, or we must admit that there is a God who can speak—the same God who has given us ears to hear.

## CHAPTER XVII

### OF THE PRACTICAL TEST OF THE THEORY

EVERY theory must admit of being tested, and a theory of life must be judged by the results which it tends to produce. We can only say "tends to produce," because it is the action of the man who holds the theory on which the results depend. It may seem unnecessary to repeat that a sound theory of life will not *by itself* produce good conduct ; but so many people persist in judging religion by those who profess but do not practise it, that the repetition may be forgiven.

What, then, do we mean by practice ? and what are the results which we may expect such practice to produce ?

In the first place, a man who accepts the belief in God must obviously devote some part of each day to remembering Him. It may be truly said that this is the essential part of prayer. We have fallen so much into the habit of identifying prayer with petition that we have lost our sense of perspective : after all, for a Christian, the Lord's Prayer must be regarded as setting the true standard, and very few of its clauses

are petitions in the ordinary sense of the term.

As a corrective it would be well if we could think of prayer in the fine phrase of Brother Lawrence, as *The Practice of the Presence of God*. We have decided that God has a purpose for us, and it follows that He must take an interest in the fulfilment of that purpose. Undoubtedly it requires a great effort both of faith and imagination to believe in His individual care for us ; but that effort must be made if religion is to mean anything in our lives. After all, it is safer to build on our knowledge than on our ignorance, and if we know, as I think we may, that this purpose is real, we shall not be daunted by the amount of questions which we cannot answer.

Believe, then, that God has a purpose for you, and may be trusted to help you to fulfil it. That should be the first thought in our minds when we begin the day, and when we end it we should ask ourselves how far that purpose has been fulfilled.

It might seem an inevitable step to remember that, if God has a purpose for us, He has one also for all with whom we have

to do, but it is a step which most of us find it terribly hard to take. Only by taking it consciously shall we make sure that we treat other people not as means to our own comfort, but as sons of God, and therefore brothers of our own.

Prayer means, in fact, the endeavour to see ourselves, and other people, and the events of our life, as God sees them. In so far as we succeed in doing this we can be sure that we see things and people in their right proportion.

We shall find, if we persevere, that our own sense of proportion is gradually corrected, and shall realise that we have been making mountains out of molehills and forgetting the things which really matter. Most of us would find, if we were honest, that we worry quite unnecessarily over trifles, and give very little attention to things of the importance of which we are convinced. It matters, for instance, very little if people think as much of us as we deserve, and it matters enormously whether we are really growing from year to year in unselfishness and good temper. But which of us can claim that we devote as much

attention to the latter question as to the former? Or, to put the question in another way, how much of our thought is given to ourselves and how much to other people? It has been truly said that the common error is not to think too much of oneself, but to think of oneself too much.

If you wish to understand the strength and purpose which a belief in God, and that alone, can give to a man's life, you would do well to read with attention the hundred and nineteenth Psalm. The author, with an insistence which at first sight may seem wearisome, repeats over and over again his conviction of the existence of a divine law which man is bound to obey. He knows that God's commandments are righteous, and his one desire is to understand "the word which abideth for ever in heaven" and to guide his life thereby. He hates those "that imagine evil things," and for his part has chosen what he calls "the way of truth."

As he walks along that road he finds that God's word is "a lantern unto his feet and a light unto his paths," and in the midst of a world where men keep not God's law,

and where he himself is liable to "go astray like a sheep that is lost," he has no sort of doubt that the path which he has chosen is that of "true understanding and knowledge."

And finally, it is also the path both of happiness and of freedom: there is nothing slavish in obedience to a law which is recognised as just and accepted as wise. The author would have sympathised with that great sentence in our Prayer Book which declares that the service of God is perfect freedom, for he himself had said the same thing many centuries before: "I will walk at liberty," he says, "for I seek thy commandments": he had no need to learn from St. James that there is such a thing as "the perfect law of liberty."

And as for happiness, from beginning to end of the long poem he is filled with that happiness which comes from inward peace: his first word tells of the blessing which comes from following a definite and divine road: he finds God's grace in the guidance which recalls him to it when he goes astray, and "delight" and "love" are words which are often on his lips. The monks of old took this Psalm as the basis of their daily

services ; it, or a part of it, might well form the basis of the worship of any man who is convinced that God has a purpose both for the world and for himself.

We began by speaking in terms of prayer, not in the sense of petition, but of communion with God, and it is clear that such communion is vital for any theist ; for the God in Whom belief is possible is not a vague Force, but a Personal Being, and therefore one with whom communion is possible.

It is not part of our present purpose to discuss the methods by which such communion is best maintained, for methods will differ with different temperaments. There are some to whom the ordered decencies of worship make it easy to realise God's presence, and others who find them to hinder more than they help. In the same way there are those to whom beauty, whether of music or of architecture, seems a mere distraction in their attempt to realise God's presence, and others who feel that such efforts to bring all that is beautiful into His service are the natural and proper way of expressing our homage and bring us nearer to Him.

The one thing on which we must insist is that the attempt to realise God's presence and His nearness to us must be regular and constant. We must fight against our very human tendency to divide our lives in two, whether in space or time. It is ridiculous to suppose that Sunday belongs to God in any sense which denies His authority over the other days of the week, or to allow ourselves to think that, because a church is in a special sense "the House of God," all other houses, whether public or private, are not places in His dominion, and places where He may be found. The true theist should make his own the first words of George Herbert's hymn

Teach me, my God and King,  
In all things Thee to see  
And what I do in anything  
To do it as for Thee.

In this connection it may be worth while to recall the story of Brother Lawrence, whose great phrase we have already quoted. Brother Lawrence, when he went into the monastery, was much distressed to find that he had very unwelcome duties to perform, such as cleaning the dishes and occasionally



cooking the dinner. He had thought that a monk's life consisted in a perpetual round of prayer and praise, and was disposed to think that his time was being wasted. At last there came to him the great idea which gives its title to his little book : he decided to " practise the presence of God," and to remind himself that every duty he did must be done as in His sight. Thereafter he cleaned the dishes as if God Himself were going to use them, and the dinners which he cooked were at any rate the best which he could offer if God Himself were to be the guest.

In the same spirit a schoolmaster of our own time tells us how he has tried to teach his boys that Latin Prose is as truly a piece of divine service as attendance in church, and that even games are sanctified when it is remembered that they are really played for the glory of the God Who gave us our bodies as well as our minds and souls. There is really, as he truly says, no sufficient reason for doing anything except that God wants it done, and, if that can truly be said, it is obvious that it must be done as well as possible.

Our object has been to show what must be

the effect on a man's life of a belief in God, honestly and sincerely held. It gives a meaning to all his activities, a purpose to all his efforts, and an assurance that he can rely on a power not his own to reinforce his feeble efforts.

We have been dealing so far with the pure theist rather than the Christian, and have only used Christian doctrines by way of illustration of a general truth ; but it must be observed how clearly this attitude is sketched in the two Collects for Ascension Day and the Sunday which follows, and with the necessary adaptations these Collects can be used by anyone who has at present got no further than the general belief in a good God Whose purpose he is anxious to fulfil.

The first tells us that it is our duty to "ascend to heaven in heart and mind" and there "continually to dwell": it would be impossible to express better what every worshipper of God must be trying to do. We have to attune our hearts and minds to God, so that we desire what He desires, and see things and people and events as He sees them: the process has to be "continual," for there is no hour of the day when

we are out of His presence, could we but remember it, and no task that we perform in which He is not concerned. The theist may well use the verse of the famous Christian hymn

Direct, control, suggest this day  
All I design or do or say,  
That all my powers with all their might  
In Thy sole glory may unite ;

for nothing less than that is, or should be, his ideal.

The second collect reminds us that to achieve this end we need the help of God : the Christian prays that God's Holy Spirit may comfort or strengthen him, and exalt him to the same place whither his Saviour Christ has gone before. The theist cannot use such precise language nor entertain so definite a hope ; but he, too, must believe that the God Who set him a definite task to do, Who is supremely concerned with all things that are good, cannot fail to watch his feeble efforts and to value supremely that " good will " which inspires them.

If God exists, He must be good, and it is foolish to doubt that His goodness will extend to the creatures which He has made

a sympathy and a support which we ourselves should never hesitate to give.

It seems silly to suggest that many people suppose themselves to be "better than God"; but doubts of His goodness and justice really imply nothing less. As Browning repeatedly tells us, we have no capacity for estimating God's Wisdom or His Power, but He has in His mercy granted us the ability to know what is meant by Love, and that ability we may confidently use when we are trying to estimate how He has acted in the past and how He will act towards us.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### OF BELIEF IN THE CHRISTIAN GOD

THE practical results which follow from a sincere belief in God have been shown to be both great and valuable, but it has been necessary to express them in vague and general terms. For a Christian it is possible to fill in the details and to give a living warmth to the picture, for Christians not only believe in general terms in the existence of God, but have seen in Jesus Christ "the picture of the invisible God."

Like all metaphors, this is inadequate to express the whole truth, but, like all good metaphors, it helps our thinking. A picture is not the same thing as the original, but it enables us to form a true conception. In the same way, the phrase "Son of God" has its limitations, but carries the conception further; for it encourages us to believe in a real identity of character between Jesus and His Heavenly Father; the picture has become alive. But perhaps the other metaphor enshrined in our creeds, "Light of Light"—that is to say, Light sprung from Light—is the easiest of comprehension.

All our earthly light comes from the sun : were the sun itself to shine with full force on the earth the light would be unbearable : the light which we enjoy is true sunlight, shining in a way which gives its fullest benefit to man. In the same way Jesus Christ showed us all that could be shown in one earthly life of the true nature of God : he did not show us all the truth, but all that he showed us was true.

Though this is not, in the literal sense of the word, a book concerned with Christian evidences, but rather with the evidence for the existence of God, it is obvious that the only God in whom its readers are likely to believe is the God of Christianity ; it will therefore be right to consider very briefly some of the special characteristics of that religion, and some of the special difficulties to which Christian belief is exposed.

In the first place, Christianity is an historical religion based on the life, death and resurrection of an historical figure, Jesus Christ. This makes a clear distinction between it and other faiths. Buddha was an historical figure, but modern Buddhism shows

“a complete indifference to the original character and views of its founder” ; Mohammed was an historical figure, but the religion which he founded is based on what he wrote, not on his personal character or on the events of his life. Christianity is, and must be, based on the historic life of One who lived and died and rose from the dead two thousand years ago.

There will always be those who are shocked at such an idea, and refuse to believe that the divine could really be manifested under the conditions of human life.

One who has recently visited Jerusalem is vividly conscious of the disadvantages which attend any association of the divine with any particular spot. The Holy Sepulchre, it must be frankly said, is a disgrace to Christianity. It is not that the site itself, like too many in the Holy City, owes its origin to greed and superstition : history and archæology combine to attest its claims to be the authentic site of Calvary and the tomb ; but the innate vulgarity of the human race has done everything possible to rob it of its sanctity. To be led from one tawdry shrine to another and to be pestered con-

tinually for money, which, wherever it may go, certainly is not expended on the upkeep of the ancient church, is an experience as depressing as it is disgusting. The modern pilgrim may well recall Boccaccio's story of the unbeliever who was paradoxically converted to Christianity by the sight of mediæval Rome: no religion, he said, which was not divine could have survived such scandalous representatives.

But the reaction which tempts one to deny that a divine Incarnation could have taken place on such a spot is as unreasonable as it is natural. If a revelation was to be committed to "frail earthen vessels and things of no worth"—and we can conceive no other way in which such a revelation could be made—it was inevitably exposed to the degradation inherent in all earthly or all human enterprises and undertakings. The greatness of a musical composition is not lessened by being ill-played, nor is a great poem in itself vulgarised by unintelligent repetition.

The attempt has often been made to divorce Christianity from history and to represent it as a scheme of beautiful ideas



quite independent of historical fact. This is probably due to the feeling which has already been mentioned, that there is something degrading in physical existence in Time and Space, and that the Infinite cannot manifest itself until finite conditions.

That it cannot be fully so manifested all must agree, but all our experience goes to show that a manifestation suitable to our capacity is not only possible but inevitable : if beauty can be seen with human eyes, goodness can be known by human hearts ; in both cases the appreciation is limited, but it is also real. It is no disparagement of the perfect goodness of Jesus to say that his disciples failed to appreciate it in its entirety.

There is no doubt that it would be convenient not to have to defend the historical reality of particular events ; but the framers of the Christian creed were well advised not to accept so easy an escape. The Incarnation and its corollary the Resurrection must stand for the Christian as definite historical facts, however their interpretation may vary.

Christians have indeed good reason to complain that their opponents have refused

to do justice to the historical portion of their case. Mr. D. H. Lawrence, whose book *The Man who Died* is an insult not only to religion, but to art, published under the name of Davison, an historical sketch called *Movements in European History*. In it he attempts to do justice to the moral qualities of the early Christians, but omits all reference to their belief that Christ rose from the dead. It is perfectly legitimate to disbelieve in the event as having taken place, but it is intolerable for a writer of history to omit any mention of a belief which, from all the documents which we possess, we know to have been central in their minds. The evidence for the fact itself will inevitably fail to convince those who are not prepared to believe in its possibility, though we may fairly say that it is as good as we have any right to expect: the evidence for the belief being held is altogether beyond question.

The early Christians certainly did not think of Christ as a wonderful teacher who had come to a cruel end: they thought of him as the Son of God who had risen from the dead and whose claims as an interpreter of

God's will were therefore beyond dispute. Any account of them which omits this vital fact is contemptible as history.

Historians, even when they avoid elementary errors of this kind, often show an imperfect appreciation of what Christianity stands for. Very naturally, from their point of view, they regard it as one among many schemes for improving human life, and judge it harshly because it has so lamentably failed to translate its beliefs into action. But Christianity is much more than a moral code, however high that code in theory may be: it stands for a view of man and his destiny, and, as we believe, for the only view which gives a reasonable explanation of his existence and a reasoned hope for his future. Even the worst of Popes or the most worldly of eighteenth-century parsons had continually on his lips the words "Our Father" which are the Christian's title-deeds to life and immortality. They would maintain that it is literally true to say in the words of St. Paul's epistle to Timothy that "Christ Jesus brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

There may be no "gospel," or no good news, for the world : if there is, it is assuredly to be found in the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Such attempts to deny or to discount the historical background of Christianity are bound to fail, for it is precisely its glory that it claims to show that the gulf between God and man is not impassable, but that a real Incarnation can and did take place. The problem of all religion is to find and express the right relationship between God and man. Some religions, like Mohammedanism, err because they exalt God so highly that no room is left for any real activity of man ; others, like Confucianism, concentrate on conduct and provide no real place for God : Christianity claims to do justice to both sides of the problem.

The Hebrew Psalmist had the root of the matter in him when he wrote, " Who is like unto the Lord our God, who hath his dwelling so high and yet humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth ? "—words which foreshadow the self-humiliation of Christ ; another Psalmist in a magnificent passage puts side by side

God's rule over the planets: "He telleth the number of the stars and calleth them all by their names;" and His loving care for man: "He healeth those that are broken in heart and giveth medicine to heal their sickness."

In the same spirit, Christianity makes no claim as against God—all that happens is His free initiative: "We love Him because He first loved us"; but it believes that the goodness of God led Him to come to our help, and such help, as we may reverently say, was a divine necessity for One Whose nature and Whose name is Love. The Christian gospel of the Incarnation is summed up in the sentence "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

We need not be greatly disturbed by the fact that "incarnation stories" are common: it may rather be held that it is a true instinct which leads mankind to expect something of the kind; for it is certain that we can conceive no other method by which God could so clearly make Himself known to man. The Christian story stands on its

own merits: it shrinks from no criticism, confident in the belief, which history has done nothing to shake but much to confirm, that the Figure which it portrays is in itself perfect, unmarred by any of those local prejudices and shortcomings which all other historical figures display. We say of Jesus, as his disciples said long ago, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

## CHAPTER XIX

### OF THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF SUCH BELIEF

CHRIST is to Christians the Lord of all good life, and they look to him with confidence for guidance in the perplexities of every day. The first thing which strikes us is that he gave no definite instructions: he told his followers to be "perfect" and showed them in what direction "perfection" lay, but he gave no detailed commands as to their conduct.

At first sight this seems disappointing, but a little reflection shows that it is really our own laziness which causes the disappointment. There is nothing which human nature so ardently desires as to be saved the trouble of thinking; but if life is a training and a testing ground for character we cannot be allowed to escape from that painful duty. Christ "knew what was in man," and it was precisely for that reason that he taught us in principles, and at times in parables, which required thought for their comprehension.

If we wish to appreciate his wisdom we have only to look at the opposite methods

as practised by Mohammed. He also thought, not without reason, that he was a good judge of human nature, and he pandered to human laziness by giving his followers the most minute injunctions as to their religious life. He told them how often they were to pray, in what direction they were to look, and what form of words they were to use; he told them what proportion of their money they were to give in alms; he regulated the occasions of their fasting. There is no doubt that such a method was "sensible": it secured the maximum of obedience with the minimum of effort, and made it possible, for some time at any rate, for the observer to contrast the strictness with which Mohammed's commands were obeyed with the laxity of the followers of Christ.

But the moral results were disastrous: where everything had been settled once for all by the prophet, there was no room for any initiative on the part of the disciple. Progress, whether in thought or practice, became impossible, and that is why Mohammedanism, though splendidly successful in raising barbarous and savage tribes to decency



and self-respect, has and can have no message for the modern world.

Christ's method was diametrically opposed to this: he laid down principles and left it for his followers to work out their application. There are two most striking instances of his success: it is generally agreed that it is Christianity which is responsible for the abolition of slavery in the Western world and for the emancipation of woman, and yet you will find no saying of Christ which has any direct bearing upon either problem.

He never mentioned slavery: he was content to teach that God was the Father of all mankind, and to hint, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, that it was our own narrowness of mind which limited our conception of our duty to one another. It took many centuries before Christian people began to doubt whether the injunction to love our neighbours as ourselves was consistent with treating some of them as slaves: it is an ironical fact that in Elizabethan days the ship in which Sir John Hawkins conveyed the first African slaves to America was called the *Jesus*. But the leaven was working,

as Christ had foretold : at last a Christian gentleman had the courage to raise his voice in this country, and at once the Christian sentiment of England rallied round him. It has taken a long time, but our attitude to the slave trade, when once the nation had begun to think, has been described by an impartial historian as " one of the few perfectly virtuous pages in the history of nations."

It was the same with the emancipation of woman. Christ made no " pronouncement " on the subject, but women were among his closest followers, and it was to a Samaritan woman, to the unconcealed surprise of his disciples, that he uttered some of his deepest thoughts. It was left for St. Paul (who has been most unjustly denounced as an enemy of the female sex) to erect his Master's practice into a principle and to lay it down that " in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female." Once more it took many centuries before Christian people were prepared to translate this principle into action, and in some ways the process is not yet complete ; but it is very certain that women owe the position which they have obtained

in the civilised world to the unspoken word of Jesus Christ.

There is no possible reason for supposing that the process is complete. The sins and follies of our forefathers seem to us incredible; but we may be very sure that a later generation will be equally amazed at our blindness to obvious truth. As we look back at the days of the Industrial Revolution, we marvel that any sensible (let alone Christian) people could have thought it right to house workmen with no regard for decency, or to allow cities to grow up with no regard to considerations either of beauty or of health. We are paying a heavy price in cash for the follies of our predecessors, and still more in the growth of a population with a real and obvious grievance against society.

But what of ourselves? Do we not still allow slums to continue, even though our conscience is aroused? Can we dare to talk about loving our brethren when we acquiesce for them in conditions which we know to be intolerable? What will posterity think of our failure to rise above narrow national competition, and our tolerance of an atmosphere of war?

These are the questions which future generations will reasonably ask. As has already been said, I think that the progress which has been made in the last century is amazing: it is often forgotten that there has been no such century of missionary progress in the whole history of Christianity, and in social reform there has certainly been nothing comparable in the history of England. Nor is the international situation without very definite grounds for encouragement: our consciences are awakened at last, and public opinion, which is what really decides the course of history, is a more real and a more moral force than ever before.

But the point is that, in so far as we are progressing at all, we are doing so because we are beginning to take seriously the principles which Christ laid down, and it is only by that method that there can be any real hope of advance either for an individual or a nation. Progress, in short, means nothing more or less than a greater willingness to accept his teaching as wise and his revelation of God's character as true.

We see it in our own lives whenever we

make an honest attempt to think his meaning out, and to reject the foolish idea that he was merely using pious exaggerations. When he told us to "love our enemies" he was not bidding us to *like* them, but to remember always that they are our brothers and to seek their good. And in truth what alternative is there? Are we prepared to admit that we wish them harm—that is, moral harm, the only harm which really matters? Do we wish them to be worse than they are? The very thought is absurd: we wish them to be better and wiser: we may believe that it is our right and duty to restrain their evil acts and to force them into wiser courses, and those who believe that Christ would never have sanctioned the use of force must face the question what would have been the duty of the good Samaritan if he had arrived when the outrage was being carried out. The use of force is only definitely anti-Christian when it is employed for a selfish end, and there is no such sharp distinction as is often drawn between the word of denunciation and the act of restraint. We have a duty to our brethren, and do not fulfil it by merely

allowing them to continue in their evil ways. It was not by mere "kindness," or "Christian charity" falsely so called, that Jesus endeavoured to turn the Pharisees from the error of their ways.

Throughout all life, individual and national, we shall find the same thing true. Only by the application of Christ's principles can our problems be solved. We shall make many mistakes in our endeavours to apply them, but the fault lies in our own dullness of apprehension. If we are honestly attempting to follow them, or, in other words, to do the will of God which Christ alone was competent to interpret, we are in harmony with the purpose of the world. Our efforts will be judged, not by their success, but by the sincerity of our purpose, for the world is in the hands of our Father, Who, as we often remind ourselves, is not only Almighty, but Most Merciful.

## CHAPTER XX

### OF THE EVIDENCE TO BE DRAWN FROM THE LIVES OF CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS

It has already been said that the most effective argument leading men to a belief in God is its obvious influence upon the lives of those who hold it. In the same way it is the lives of great Christians which seem to most of us to provide the strongest of secondary arguments for the Christian faith. The primary argument lies, of course, in the life and character of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospels : but his followers in every age have been able to add their own convincing witness.

It is no mere accident that St. Francis of Assisi should be the best-loved of all the saints, for he is the man who seems to us to have followed most closely in the footsteps of his Master ; the message preached in the thirteenth century was largely the same which Galilee had heard twelve hundred years before, and its attractive power remained the same. And what is pre-eminently true of St. Francis is true in its degree of every other faithful follower of Christ.

It may be one of the Desert Saints, with "a great rivalry among them . . . who shall be more merciful than his brother, kinder, humbler, more patient"; it may be St. Louis on his throne, "whom to see or to hear brought comfort and calm to the most troubled spirit"; it may be some saint of our own time, such as many of us have been privileged to know,

the unknown good who rest  
In God's still memory folded deep.

"All these," we may say with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "died in faith," and form for us "the great cloud of witnesses" who prove that Jesus, the Author of our Faith, was a true guide upon the road that leads to God. The words of one of their number, the great Bishop King of Lincoln, are true in their degree of them all, "I am anxious to prove, if it please God, in my own life that the Gospels are true."

There is the crowning proof which runs all through the Christian centuries, showing how a real belief in the one true God produces a life the attraction of which no man



is able to resist. He may refuse to accept the doctrine on which it is based, just as many people try to separate Christ's moral teaching from his creed; but it is for them to try to explain how it is that results so glorious can be based on an illusion or a lie.

The saints are no monopoly of any century or of any section of the Christian Church: they represent "the blessed company of all faithful people," and show how blessed a thing their faith is—blessed in the happiness which it brings to those who hold it, and in the good works to which it inevitably leads. To take a few modern names at random, there are some who are more attracted by the evangelical faith of William Wilberforce, or Shaftesbury, bearing such splendid fruits in action; others by the mystic faith which inspired General Gordon; others again by the more scholarly faith which shone out in the lives of the great Tractarians. But though "there are diversities of gifts" it is "the same Spirit," and that Spirit is the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilling himself in many ways.

Our Lord promised that his Spirit would

guide us into "all the truth," and the collect for Whit Sunday reminds us that this is not only a promise of intellectual illumination, but of a "right judgment in all things." The saints are those who have claimed and received the fulfilment of that promise shown not only in the heroism which guides a Father Damien to his glorious enterprise among the lepers, but in the loyal performance of everyday duty which (as the great William Law reminded us) can make a tradesman "a saint in his shop."

The saints bear continuous and convincing testimony to what Dr. Glover has called "Jesus in the experience of men": I cannot do better than quote the sentences with which he closes his book which bears that title:—

Jesus has, indeed, given the human heart the capacity for God. God is comprehended in how many ways, along the line of every faculty, and of every sensitiveness? God speaks to one man in colour, to another in sound, to another in movement, to another in rhythm, to another in the need of the world. Jesus through all the centuries has been making the human heart larger, and more human, and more apt to get hold of God, and then to want more of him. He

has been, of all beings, the most sympathetic with all God's creatures, the great interpreter, not only of God, but of everything in which God is interested, the bird on the wing, the flower in the field. Where the spirit of the Lord Jesus is, there is liberty.

I spoke just now of a "mystic" faith, and no one who has any appreciation of the value of evidence will be disposed to neglect the testimony which the great mystics give. Mysticism is not a subject which the ordinary man finds it easy to comprehend; but he knows at least that from St. Paul's time to our own there have been those who have claimed that they have for a time been "caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." He will judge all such claims according to his temperament, and particular claims in accordance with his estimate of the character of those who make them; but it is impossible to deny that the claim to this "inner light" or to this insight into a world beyond experience is made by many whom we cannot but respect.

"It is necessary for us, who are neither saints nor prophets, to sit at the feet of those who have seen the mysteries of the Kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup> So Dean Inge writes, and his name will carry weight with some who might be disposed to dismiss such evidence as mere illusion. There have, no doubt, been some mystics who are clearly abnormal; but anyone who studies the English mystics as described in the book from which I have quoted will find them extremely sane and sensible. They are men and women filled with the love of God, and when they declare that they have heard His voice we cannot but listen with respect. In the eighteenth century, when "enthusiasm" was suspect and English religion generally at a low ebb, we find William Law proclaiming the complete happiness which the spirit of love can bring into a man's life.

Oh, Sir [he exclaims] would you know the blessing of all blessings, it is this God of love dwelling in your soul, and killing every root of bitterness, which is the pain and torment of every

<sup>1</sup> *Studies of English Mystics*, p. 3.

earthly, selfish love. For all wants are satisfied, all disorders of nature are removed, no life is any longer a burden, every day is a day of peace, everything you meet becomes a help to you, because you see or do is all done in the sweet, gentle element of love.

This may not be the kind of evidence to carry weight in a court of law, but it has a very definite value for us who wish to show how the belief in the Christian God can change the whole of life.

Why should it be thought impossible, we may well ask, that God should speak to the creatures whom He has made? He will not, indeed, speak in such a manner as to destroy our freedom or to save us the trouble of thinking for ourselves: there is nothing mechanical in His dealing with us; but if we have once firmly grasped that conception of the Divine Fatherhood which is the central truth of Christ's teaching, we shall be ready to look for His guidance and to welcome it when given. If Socrates had what he calls "a divine somewhat," a familiar oracle, which was in the habit of opposing him when he was in danger of some slip or error; if the Quakers feel, as

they say, not only a "stop in the mind" which fulfils a similar purpose, but also a divine "concern" which leads them to most fruitful action, is there any reason for Christians to doubt that their God can make His will known? Christ said that his sheep were those who heard his voice; and when Judas asked him how it was that that voice would be audible to some and not to others, he laid down the principle that love and obedience are the essential qualifications: "If a man love me he will keep my word; and my Father will love him and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Christ's tests of discipleship are always moral: "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God," and what keeps men from following is that they "seek glory one of another and seek not the glory which cometh of God only."

Such arguments as these are in a sense secondary: if there is no God, it is obviously useless to seek for signs of His guidance, but if there is, and if the only God in Whom we can believe is the God Whom Christ

revealed, it is right and natural for us to expect that He still does not "leave the world without witness," and to find reinforcement for our faith from those to whom that witness has been clearly given.

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## CHAPTER XXI

### OF CHRISTIANITY AS A FINAL REVELATION OF GOD

IN the very early days of Christianity its Apostles were described by some of their opponents as men who wished to "turn the world upside down." This may seem very strong language to use of the arrival in Thessalonica of two Christian Jews, Paul and Silas, but it has in it a very considerable element of truth. Christianity *does* aspire to turn the world upside down, or rather to reverse the motive on which men generally act, and in so far as it has been, or is being, successful, nothing less than that is what it has achieved.

The ordinary man puts self first : he may, and does, acknowledge some duties to his neighbour, but that does not prevent him from caring infinitely more for his own small successes, small pleasures and small pains than for the much larger concerns of other people. A moment's reflection will show that this is in flat contradiction to the principles which Christ laid down, and to the example which his own life gave. It is



literally impossible to think of the Jesus of the Gospels as doing a selfish act or having a selfish thought. We acknowledge this in our Catechism when we are taught to say that "our duty to our neighbour is to love him as ourselves," and you will notice that it is stated as a plain matter of duty and not as a high and perhaps unattainable ideal. The same lesson is taught in the words of the Baptismal service, where we speak of "our profession, which is to follow our Saviour Christ and to be made like unto him"; for no one could become like Christ and retain his selfishness.

If this appears, as it well may, to be asking too much of human nature, we should remind ourselves that it is a doctrine to the truth of which human nature itself bears witness. We have already noted the very remarkable fact that, selfish as we all are, we are quite unable to admire selfishness, even when the selfishness is our own, and we have rightly seen in that fact some proof of our divine origin.

We may go further and say that all our development towards manhood proceeds

along the same lines : a child is naturally selfish, in spite of what Wordsworth and some other poets have said : it thinks first of its own comforts and as it grows up it grows in consideration towards its parents and other people around it. The child who represses its tears because it knows that the sight of them would distress its mother is on the road towards manhood.

It is an astonishing reflection that all of us have occasionally done things which, because they were perfectly unselfish, were perfectly virtuous : all, it might seem, that is needed is that these unselfish moments, instead of shining out like stars in a black night, should become the normal method of our existence, and we shall remark that, just as no one has ever failed in the bottom of his heart to admire unselfishness, so none of us have ever been sorry that we have done an unselfish act.

It is needless to point out how these instincts of ours are corroborated and reinforced by Christ's teaching : the proof of its value is within the reach of every man, and may be put in the form of two simple questions : Have you ever acted as

you think Christ would have wished and repented of your act? Have you ever heard of anyone who seriously regretted following his guidance? An ounce of practice, it has been said, is worth a pound of theory, and such simple tests as these are of far more value than long arguments as to whether Christ's ideals are possible in a sinful world.

If you wish for a more learned statement of this same simple truth, let me refer you to John Stuart Mill, who would not have described himself as a Christian. "Even now," he says, "it would not be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our lives."

In other words, it may be claimed for Christian morality that it is absolute and final, in the sense that no later discoveries have thrown doubt or discredit on the principles which Christ laid down: it is natural because, as we have seen, it is in harmony with the deepest instincts of our human nature, and because it has proved

capable of winning the allegiance of men of every class, every century and every colour.

Few Christians know as much as they should of the recent history of the missionary work of the Church, and very few realise the amazing change which, so far as Protestant missions are concerned, the last century has brought about. That century has proved that Christ's teaching is as appropriate to Asia and to Africa as ever it was to Europe, and that Christ's character and his principles appeal quite as forcibly to the Indian or the Chinese as to the Englishman. If you will consider how remote is the likelihood that Mohammedanism or Buddhism would ever sweep over a European country, you will appreciate what is meant when you read of mass movements towards Christ in India, or merely study the statistics of our great missionary societies. Mass movements, no doubt, are open to criticism, but no fair-minded person can doubt the universality of the appeal which Christ makes to the world.

We have forgotten to be surprised at the very remarkable fact that his teaching, starting from an obscure province, captured

the Roman empire in three hundred years : even when every allowance has been made, it was a very wonderful achievement, but the true triumph of Christianity is not to be measured by external successes such as that : it lies rather in the fact that it has coloured the whole way of thinking of the countries to which it has come, and has in a very real sense turned the world of thought upside down. If you dislike that phrase as too dramatic, we may fall back on the old word "conversion," which means turning round, and say that Christianity, wherever it has been effectively preached, has "turned round" the heads of those who have received it so that they realise that their eyes should be set, if they would be true men and women, not on their own interests, but on those of other people. Christ's "new commandment" was that we should "love one another," and even by those who make no effort to obey it, it is recognised as representing the ideal of human life. The Jews of Salonica were quite right when they protested that Paul and Silas challenged the supremacy of Cæsar, and said that there was "another king, one Jesus."

The history of civilisation since that time has really been the history of the slow realisation of his kingship and of his authority over human life. As we have seen, it has only been by degrees that Christians have realised what was implied in the principles which he laid down: we have noticed how in the two crucial instances of the institution of slavery and the position of women it was a very long time before his teaching took effect; but it did take effect in the end. Those who doubt that it was from him that the inspiration came have only to contrast the progress made in this direction by non-Christian societies. There is a striking utterance of the American poet, James Russell Lowell, which puts the point with unmistakable clearness:

Show me twelve square miles in the world in which I live where childhood is cared for, where womanhood is revered, where old age is protected, where life and property are absolutely safe, where it is possible for a decent man to live decently, where the Gospel of Christ has not gone before and made that life possible; and then I will listen to your revilings of my Master.

That challenge is as unanswerable to-day

as on the day when it was first uttered, and we should do well to ponder on the lesson which it teaches.

No one who has read this book with any attention will suppose that it is suggested that in the moral sphere the record of Christianity is one of unbroken progress : on the contrary, there have been long periods in which the Church seemed to have forgotten its mission to reform the world and to have acquiesced in the current morality of the day. But the acquiescence has never been final or complete, and after long periods of stagnation men have arisen to recall it to the original source of its inspiration and to suggest new fields in which Christ's eternal principles should be applied.

We shall remember that he deliberately chose to lay down principles and not to give the world a new moral code : such codes date themselves by the century in which they were promulgated and have no message for the modern world. Christianity has shown its power gradually to transform every political and economic system, just because it is not itself identified with any, but rests on the great foundations of the

Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

There have been times when Christians have despaired of the task of reforming the world and when the monastery or the hermit's cell has been sought as the only place in which the Christian life could be lived, but, with all their virtues, neither the monk nor the hermit is the typical Christian. He is bound by the doctrine of the Incarnation not to despair of the world, for a world into which it was possible for Christ to be born, and in which he lived a perfect life, cannot be incapable of redemption. When we consider the vastness of the task we shall not be overwhelmed by the thought of the slowness of our progress, and, while we shall be ashamed of our lamentable failures in the past, shall face the future with hope.

It need hardly be said that it is not only in the official acts of the Church, nor only in the lives of professed Christians, that the influence of Christ is to be seen. He himself compared the effect of his teaching to that of leaven which works unseen and unrecognised, and his principles, as we have seen, are



accepted by countless thousands who would deny his divinity. It is a devout Jew, Mr. Montefiore, who describes the career of Jesus as "in all probability the most important and influential life which has ever been lived by man." Bishop Henson, who quotes this saying in his Gifford Lectures, adds some words which make clear the difference between Christ and the founder of any other faith and justify him in saying that

The history of religion provides no parallel to the personal influence of Jesus. . . . The founder of Buddhism was no model for normal men: the founder of Mohammedanism was no model for any man. The problem of their modern disciples is to explain away, rather than explain, their personal record. Jesus alone is able to offer himself as the sufficient illustration of his own doctrine. Christianity is unique in attaching vital importance to the personal character of the Founder. . . . The moral teacher who calls his disciples to accept his example as the law of their conduct can only command their obedience so long as they own his moral supremacy. Failure in him draws doubt and unbelief in them. That there was no failure is the recorded verdict of Christ's contemporaries; and that verdict has not been successfully challenged since.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Henson, *Christian Morality*, p. 301.

The full title of the lectures from which I have been quoting is *Christian Morality, Natural, Developing, Final*, and anyone who studies the implications of these three adjectives will understand the unique position which Christianity holds among the religions of the world. Its morality is natural because it is in harmony with the deepest instincts of our mortal nature: it is developing because it welcomes and assimilates all truth and stimulates the faculties of man: it is final because it is impossible to go beyond or to forget the emphasis which Jesus laid on personal goodness, the obligation of social service and the nobility of self-sacrifice. It remains as true as on the day when the words were first written that "other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Personal devotion to one who lived two thousand years ago might well seem to be impossible if we did not know it to be a real and obvious fact. Its theological explanation lies in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Jesus, which he promised to give to his followers and which, to judge by his

words, is in a very real sense identical with his personal presence. If, in his earthly life, his influence was limited to the comparatively small numbers who could hear and see him, it is now available for all "faithful people." In the quotation from the Baptism service which we gave just now you will remember that the phrase used was that we are "*to be made* like to him." We do not rely solely upon our own efforts, though any theory which does not call for them is clearly immoral. Jesus, lifted up on the Cross, still draws all men unto him, as he said that he would: it is his spirit, working in our hearts, which enables us to hear and to answer the call.

In the continuance of this process lies the one hope for the world, and despite the apparent apostasy of some Christian nations there is good ground for hope. Christian ideals have made striking progress even in a world which seems to repudiate his name: anyone who compares the Treaty of Versailles (with all its faults) with the Treaty of Vienna will recognise a change which is indisputably in the Christian direction: anyone who compares our present attitude

to the poor with that of a century ago will see that, whatever other causes may have co-operated to change our outlook, that change must assuredly be one which Christ would approve.

Nor should we, in our European pride, assume that we are the people best fitted to translate Christ's principles into realities. There was a time when Britons were regarded as the most remote of barbarians, less likely than anyone in the world to illustrate the perfect life. The last century has brought new races into the fold and anyone who cares (for example) to inquire into the number of Chinese Christian martyrs will realise that Europe has no monopoly of the noble army. The Christian vision, as depicted in the Revelation, is of "the kings of the earth" bringing their glory into the heavenly city, each nation offering its own peculiar gift. It may well be, in the providence of God, that a nobler and a truer Christianity may arise among peoples now despised; but that Christianity will be built on the same foundation on which our own civilisation is raised.

In the meantime, the mere fact of our

dissatisfaction with the world in which we live is in itself a proof that we are setting ourselves a higher standard and judging our results by a more exacting rule. We often hear of "divine discontent" and a discontent with a world which is not obeying the divine will has clearly a right to that epithet. The mere controversy about the possibility of a right or a Christian war, however extravagant may be the arguments advanced on either side, show at least a desire to discover Christ's will in such a matter which was very far from common a century ago.

Here, then, as it seems to me, we have a coherent theory about man's place in the universe which justifies his aspirations and gives a meaning to his search for truth. That might be said of all religions worthy of the name, but it is pre-eminently true of Christianity, the one religion which has proved capable of surviving the changes of the centuries and of assimilating new truth. It is the one religion which, wherever it has been transplanted, has been found capable of bearing the fruits of a life which the world agrees in regarding as good, and, so far from

being exhausted, it has within the last hundred years visibly expanded its dominion over the hearts of men. There are probably more Christians now than there have ever been, for recent mission work has been more successful than in any previous century, and there are certainly more "good" Christians—that is to say, more thinking Christians, than in the days of its unchallenged supremacy. Dante may have been wrong in thinking Constantine's conversion a disaster, but it is obvious that for a profession of religion to be a road to honour and prosperity is to invite a very unreal increase of numbers.

It is based not only on that general belief in a good and wise God to which reason would dispose us, but on the definite revelation of One proved to be the Son of God not by the miracles which he rejected as a means of conversion, but by the perfection of a character the splendour of which grows more clear with the passing of time. If the theory on which he lived his perfect life was mistaken, we may well despair of logic: it is, in every sense of the word, reasonable to believe that such results were founded in truth, and that we can trust the

picture which he drew of God, his Father and ours.

On the character of God which he drew, and himself revealed, are based our hopes for this world and for the world to come. There are some, and some of the best of men, who refuse to accept his testimony because it seems to them too good to be true and we can answer them in the words of the poet

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars.

We should devote to pondering on the mysteries of Infinite Goodness some of the time which we spend in thinking blankly of the mysteries of Infinite Space or Infinite Time, and remember the words in which that other Victorian poet described how hard St. Paul found it to believe the glorious truth and how he at length found courage to do so :

Can it be true, the grace he is declaring ?

O let us trust him, for his words are fair !

Man, what is this, and why art thou despairing ?

God shall forgive thee all but thy despair.

## EPILOGUE

IT has been shown that the belief in God, so far from being a relic of the days before men had learnt to think intelligently is, in sober truth, the only sure foundation for reasonable thought of any kind. It has been shown that, in particular, if moral facts, such as duty, the difference between right and wrong, or good and bad, are objective facts, and not mere matters of personal or racial prejudice, we are bound ultimately to believe in the existence of God. We may form sound moral judgments without such a belief, just as we may believe, for instance, that the Eiffel Tower exists without knowing anything about its foundations; but without those foundations we could not possibly have the Tower. To us, in Dr. Temple's words, "the mere fact that conscience exists involves the existence of God."

If that is so, some necessary conclusions as to the moral nature of God inevitably follow: He must represent in Himself all that goodness at which our conscience bids us to aim, and so, as we have seen, the Jews



slowly came to understand not only that the Judge of all the earth must "do right," but that He must be a God of Mercy as well as a God of Justice. In that very striking play *Green Pastures*, written to describe the simple religion of the American negro, we see the God of Wrath gradually becoming the God of Love: it is an unimportant point that in that play Jehovah is made to learn love from the teaching of Hosea: the obvious heresy does not affect the general value of the argument.

We have further seen some of the practical results which inevitably follow from such a belief; for if God is on the throne we can be sure that right and truth must ultimately prevail. If we are living in an ordered universe we gain strength from the consciousness of a purpose behind our own existence and patience which enables us both to bear the ills of the present and to work hopefully for their removal. This strength and patience we have seen exemplified at its best in the sober confidence of the 119th Psalm, whose author is confident that the Word of God "abideth for ever in heaven," and that however often he may

personally go astray there is a sure peace and happiness awaiting the man who does not forget His commandments.

But it is clear that this falls far short of the peace and happiness which is possible for those, and those only, who accept the Christian gospel and are able to think of God in the way which Christ made possible. Our final task must be to endeavour to put into words some of the salient features of the portrait which he drew. This can most simply be done by dwelling on the three great words Light and Life and Love.

The conception of God as Light presents Him under the only metaphor which we can worthily use. The more we learn of the powers of light the more we see how utterly our existence depends upon it. In the ordinary affairs of every day there is nothing so paralysing as darkness: even the most familiar room can become a strange place in which the simplest motion is dangerous and difficult: we lose all sense of proportion and blunder ridiculously over the simplest movements. It is not only that all beauty has gone out of life, but life itself has lost its meaning: the man born

blind may learn to find one, but he is really seeing through other people's eyes, and using the light which they, not he, can see.

If we apply this thought to the intellectual or spiritual sphere we can see how darkness either in the mind or in the soul is the ultimate disaster which can befall us. False judgments of things and people, false estimates of virtues and vices, are all different forms of the affliction which such darkness brings. It is no mere accident that the story of Creation begins with the coming of Light: that metaphor runs through the Bible until it culminates in its last book with the picture of the city which needs the sun no more because God Himself gives His people light.

And of course it is when the Bible speaks of Jesus Christ that this metaphor is most fully and most fruitfully employed. When he comes into the world, "the people who sat in darkness see a great light"; when Symeon hails him in the temple it is as the light which is to lighten the Gentiles, just as Zacharias had foretold that he would come "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."

And in very literal truth that is what Christ has done. The light which shone over his cradle at Bethlehem shone throughout his life and shines with brightest radiance from his Cross. In that light we see ourselves and other people as God sees us: we see His purpose for our lives and for those of our neighbours: we see the accidents of life in their true proportion and are given the power to judge aright between the qualities which contend for our admiration. To endeavour to act in a way which Christ could approve is a simple and sufficient guide for all our conduct: the Light has come.

It is easy to see how this conception of a life in the Light passes into that of a life of Love: indeed, the transition is made for us in so many words in the first Epistle of St. John: "the darkness," he says, "is passing away, and the true light already shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him."

So we pass to that great saying "God is

Love." In its literal form it is to be found only in St. John's Epistle, but no one can read the Gospels without realising that this idea is implicit throughout the teaching of Jesus. He contrasts the love of earthly parents who, being evil, know how to give good gifts to their children with the unfailing charity of the Heavenly Father, in whose sight "the very hairs of your head are all numbered": the divine love extends throughout all creation, so that not even a sparrow can fall to the ground unregarded. "Fear not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows."

Like so many other great words, "love" has been debased by constant use: it is often used to denote a mere physical attraction, and in too many hymns its use suggests a mere sentiment of affection. It should be said very plainly that "love" and "liking" are two very different things. It is impossible for us to like everyone, and we were never commanded to do so: what we are bidden to do is to do to others as we would have them do to us—that is, constantly to seek their good as if it were our own. If we once realise this we shall under-

stand the paradox which underlies our Lord's command to love our enemies, which is incomprehensible so long as we assume that it refers to affection in the ordinary sense. Of course we cannot like our enemies, or words would have lost their meaning ; but we are bound to remember that they, like us, are children of God, and that it is our duty to seek their good. This may, in some circumstances, involve sharp opposition, and there is nothing "unloving" about that if we can be sure that our own motives are pure. After all, everyone must desire that his enemies should be changed, in respect of those qualities which he thinks evil, and if we can honestly say that all we want is that they should be better and wiser men, that is precisely what we desire for our best friends.

No doubt it is extremely hard to be sure of the purity of our own motives, but the difficulty arises from our own weakness, and not from the divine wisdom of the command. It has been truly said that the real danger is not that our enemies should behave badly to us, but that we should behave badly to them ; for the only things

which can really harm us are those which have their origin in our own hearts.

The life in the light is the life of love, and it is only in the light which comes from the Christian God that it can be fully and adequately lived. The most astonishing fact about human nature is its persistent belief in love, felt even by those who are living very selfish lives: it is the divine spark within us, and the clearest proof that we have a share in God's own nature. Life, as Browning said,

Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,  
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is. '

"Love came down at Christmas"; not for the first time, for the "great commandments" which Christ gave, in which love is spoken of as a duty, both come from the Old Testament; but since the first Christmas the path has been made clear and the example set: "this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."

And so we come to the last and greatest of these small words—to the word Life. In our common use of language this word

has been degraded also, and such phrases as "seeing life" or "enjoying life" show the paltry meaning which we have given to it. Even those who take a less degraded view find at first sight something strange in the idea that it is only the man who loves who is really and truly alive. The doctors have their point of view: they will rightly certify a man to be alive so long as his heart is beating, though all his limbs may be paralysed and all his faculties be in abeyance. But there is no reason why God should not take a different view: in the tremendous words of the Collect for Quinquagesima Sunday we are warned that "whosoever liveth without charity (or love) is counted dead before God," and if God counts us as dead it is cold comfort to know that an insurance company regards us as still alive.

The death of the soul or the heart is the true death: there is a terrible Fable of Stevenson's called "The Touchstone" in which the hero applies his magic pebble to his brother, "and behold, the man was lying, his soul was shrunk into the smallness of a pea, and his heart was a bag of little



fears like scorpions and love was dead in his bosom." Can we say that in any true sense such a man is alive ? And, if not, are we not forced to admit that in proportion as each of us allows love to perish in his heart he is steadily dying, however vigorous his body may be ?

The same idea is to be found in the greatest of Christian poets : when Dante went down into Hell, he found there an acquaintance of his whom he believed to be still living in Genoa. He was told that for many years the man himself had been in hell, though his living image continued " to eat and drink and sleep and wear clothes " in the world above. Eating and drinking, sleeping and wearing clothes do not constitute Life : the spirit of Love is the breath of Life, and when that passes from a man he is finally and completely dead.

The words of the old Christmas hymn are literally true.

Light and Life to all He brings,  
Risen with healing in His wings :

the offer is made to all, and it is left to us to take it or to refuse. The Christian does

not only believe that God made the world with a purpose in which he can bear a part: he does not only believe that God has a particular purpose for him: he has been shown what that purpose is, and been given the power to fulfil it. His God is not a mere abstraction—not even a glorious abstraction like Justice, Righteousness and Truth, not even the still more glorious abstraction of Love. By the great mystery of the Incarnation, God has revealed Himself in a form which the simplest can understand.

And in the attempt to know Him man is not left to his own unaided efforts: the Spirit is with him, to guide him into all the truth, and in particular into that truth which is of supreme importance—the understanding of the message and character of Jesus. As the generations slowly pass, each learns or may learn something more of the truth: “God has yet many things to break forth out of His holy word”; but there, and there only, is the greatest of all secrets to be found. It has been written once for all in words which two thousand years have done nothing to disprove, words which have been progressively found true

in the experience of Christian men and women, "This is Life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ."

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